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2dartist

126

Issue 126 | June 2016



Design a costume for an assassin

Daarken shows how he styles a female assassin character

plus

Fantastical game illustration
Stylized animation art
Gothic-inspired illustration
Speed paint an abstract storm
Create an overgrown alien city
and much more!

Editor's Letter



ANNIE MOSS
Junior Editor

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Welcome to *2dartist* issue 126!

This month features an interview with the awesome game artist Richard Wright, who talks about his work processes and learning new skills. We also take a look at the portfolio of up-and-coming animation artist Cathleen McAllister, and explore the gothic-inspired illustrations of traditional artist Ivan Meshkov.

If that wasn't enough, discover how David Tilton develops an atmospheric cityscape, and learn how to design a mechanical suit to enhance your sci-fi character's abilities with J.C. Park. Arthur Haas paints an overgrown alien city in his signature style, Daarken demonstrates how he creates a costume for a female assassin character, and Stephanie Cost speed paints an expressive interpretation of a tropical storm.

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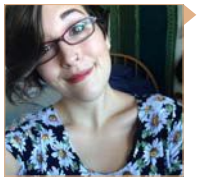
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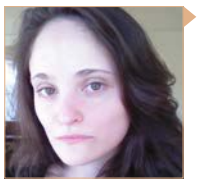
RICHARD WRIGHT
Richard Wright is an illustrator and concept artist currently living and working in Sheffield, UK. His previous clients include Blizzard Entertainment, Games Workshop, and Wizards of the Coast.



CATHLEEN MCALLISTER
Cathleen McAllister is currently a freelance visual development artist whose past work has included both games and film. Her clients have included Phenom Films, Axis Animation, and Stress Level Zero.



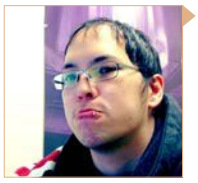
IVAN MESHKOV
Ivan Meshkov is a freelance illustrator and fine artist from Chelyabinsk, Russia. He works as a 2D artist in a game studio but likes to draw with paper, inks and paints in his spare time.



STEPHANIE COST
Stephanie is a freelance illustrator living in Seattle, Washington. She is working to find a niche for herself in the art world while exploring the Evergreen State, creating book illustrations featuring characters and landscapes.



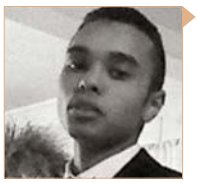
J.C. PARK
J.C. Park is an illustrator and concept artist based in Seoul, South Korea. He works on videogames, feature films, and animations. J.C. has worked on games such as *Aion* and *Legend of the Cryptids*



DAARKEN
Mike 'Daarken' Lim is a freelance illustrator and concept artist working in the game industry. Some of his clients include Gearbox Software, Wizards of the Coast, id Software, Blizzard and more.



ARTHUR HAAS
Arthur Haas is a freelance concept artist and illustrator from the Netherlands. He has a passion for science fiction, and creates artworks influenced by the genre for films, books and magazines.



DAVID TILTON
David Tilton, based in Boston, Massachusetts, is a concept artist for the game and film industry. He specializes in world design and illustration, and has recently been working on projects for StudioCanal.



GILLES BELOEIL
Gilles Beloeil is senior concept artist at Ubisoft Montréal, Canada. He has worked on multiple projects for the *Assassin's Creed* universe, and also creates concept art for print publication.

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We are always looking for tutorial artists, gallery submissions, potential interviewees, writers and more. For more information, please send a link to your work to: **annie@3dtotal.com**.

Junior Editor
Annie Moss
annie@3dtotal.com

Sub Editor
Adam Smith

Graphic Designer
Aryan Pishneshin

Advertising Manager
Kinnor Wroughton
kinnor@3dtotal.com

Studio Manager
Simon Morse
simon@3dtotal.com

Managing Director
Tom Greenway

Advertising
Media pack and rates are available upon request. Contact Kinnor Wroughton:
kinnor@3dtotal.com

International
Translation opportunities and international licenses are available. Contact Melanie Smith:
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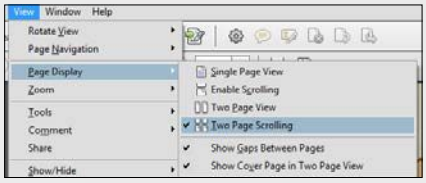
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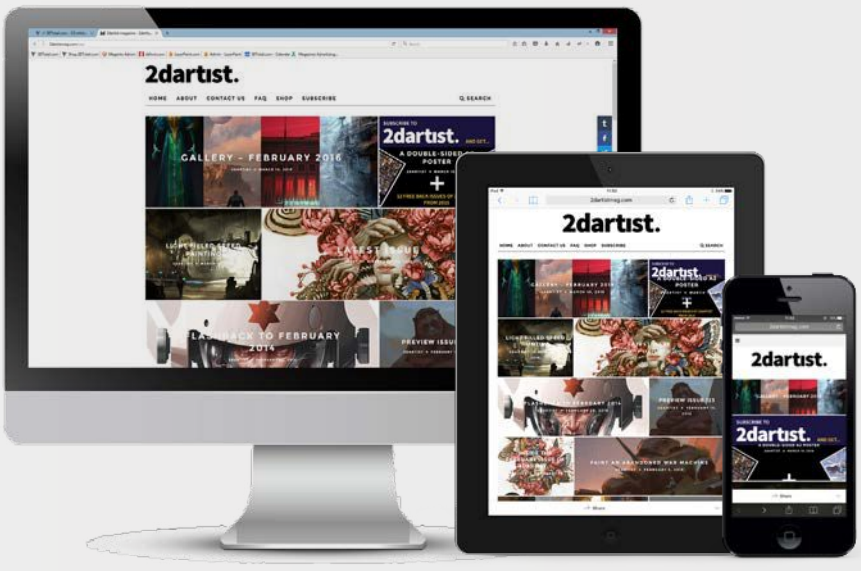
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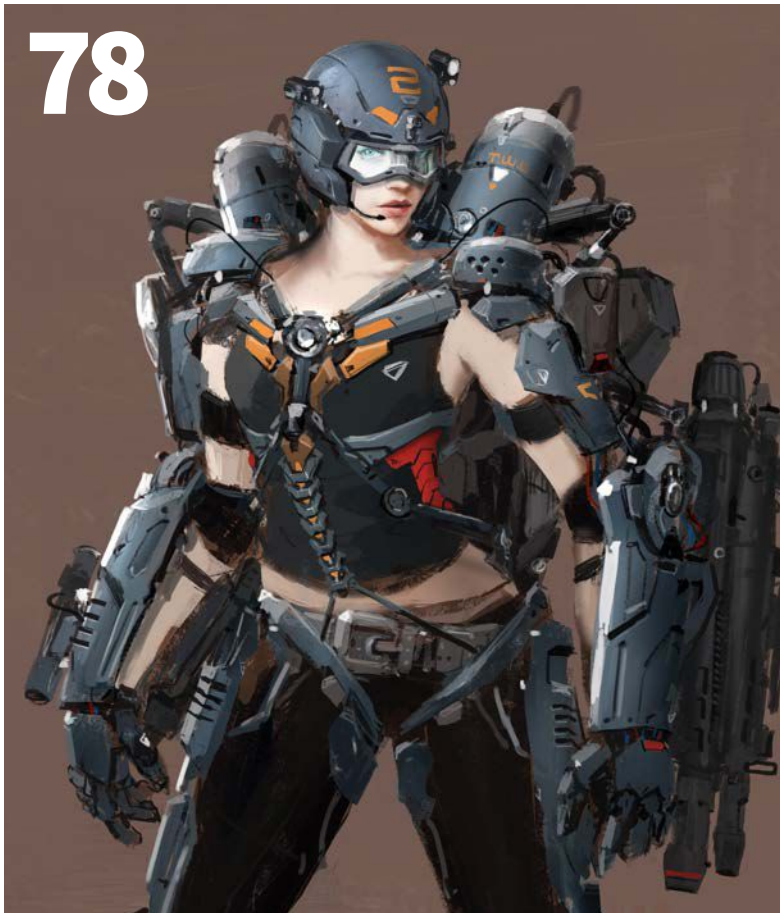
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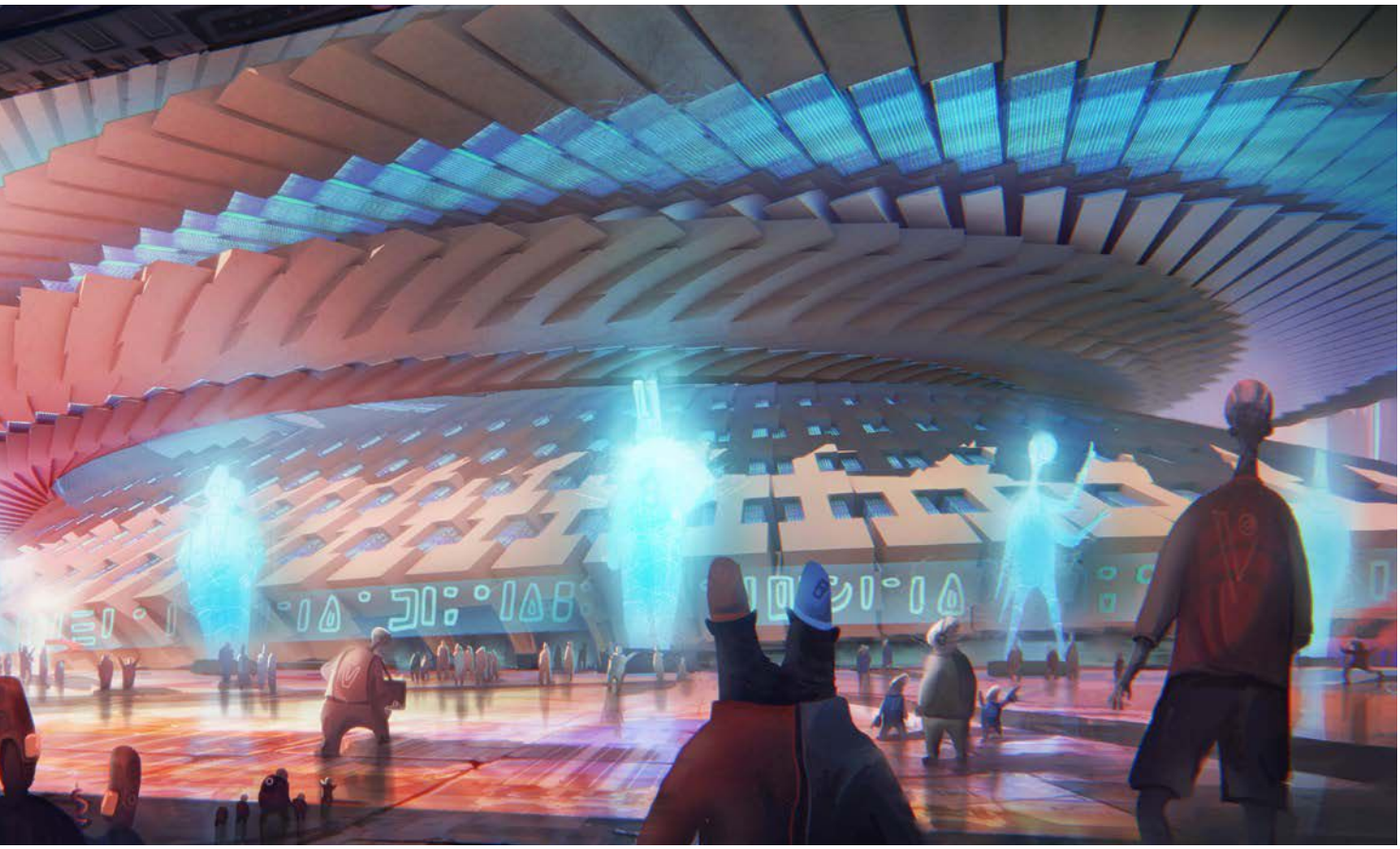




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The Artist



Richard Wright
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Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Richard Wright is an illustrator and concept artist currently living and working in Sheffield, UK. He has previously worked for clients including Blizzard Entertainment, Games Workshop and Wizards of the Coast.

Fantastical game illustrations

Richard Wright, concept artist and illustrator for projects such as *Magic: The Gathering* and *World of Warcraft*, showcases his work



Over the past five years Richard Wright has held a successful career working for companies including Blizzard Entertainment, One Pixel Brush and Ark VFX, creating for them a wide variety of work. Having made the leap from studio artist to freelance concept artist and illustrator, Richard has since taken on many substantial projects including *Magic: The Gathering* for Wizard of the Coast and the *World of Warcraft* for Games Workshop.

Inspired by both traditional and digital artists, film directors, and writers, Richard's work incorporates epic landscapes and grandiose scales with dramatic, lustrous lighting. His work invites you in to explore in more detail the fascinating worlds he creates. This month, Richard talks to *2dartist* about his work process, learning new skills, and how he believes anything can be achieved if you want it enough.



Blade 328 © Richard Wright

2dartist: Hi Richard, thanks for talking to *2dartist* today! Could you start by introducing yourself a bit to the readers?

Richard Wright: Hi! I'm an illustrator and concept artist living and working in the UK. I've been working freelance now for about five years, creating illustrations for various companies like Blizzard Entertainment, Games Workshop, and Wizards of the Coast. I also work for Shaddy Safadi's company One Pixel Brush, producing interesting concept art for various videogames.

I originally started out as an illustrator at Games Workshop where I worked for a few years before moving to a videogame company called Particle Systems. A couple of years after that I worked at a company called Ark VFX where we created pop promos, commercials and videogame cinematics. While I was there I started working freelance on *Magic: The Gathering* and the *World of Warcraft* trading card games. I eventually decided to leave and work full-time as an illustrator.

2da: You have worked on a number of varied projects creating illustrations and concepts for films, vehicle concepts and matte painting; how has working in all these different disciplines enhanced your career?

RW: Well it keeps things interesting. If I only did fantasy illustrations every day I'd probably get bored and that would begin to show in my work. Eventually I'd stop getting hired.

Each project has its own set of challenges or problems to solve – a new piece of software or technique or maybe a new way of looking at something. It can seem a bit daunting at first, but it's actually an opportunity to learn something new and to hopefully grow as an artist.



Blade 324 © Richard Wright

Plus having a varied portfolio makes you attractive to a wider range of clients.

2da: Where do you find inspiration for your work? Which other artists do you particularly admire?

RW: A boring answer, but probably the same places as everyone else really; films, TV, books, videogames, music, and nature. The work of other artists is obviously a big inspiration and motivation too. I admire John Singer Sargant, Jean-Léon Gérôme, N. C. Wyeth, Ralph McQuarrie, Craig Mullins, Yanick Dusseault and Syd Mead.

I'm also inspired by the work of David Attenborough, writers like Tolkien, Frank Herbert and Iain M. Banks, and film directors such as David Lynch, Terrence Malik, and Hayao Miyazaki, and so on. There are too many to list really.

2da: What are your preferred tools to work with generally? Are there any tools you find yourself using again and again?

RW: Most of my time is spent inside Photoshop. It's the one software I use every day and sometimes it's the only thing I need to complete an image. But I also use quite a bit of 3D software as well.

I use it for anything where perspective is important or when I want to experiment with different camera positions. Cityscapes or interiors I'd probably start in 3D. It's also really useful for vehicles and creatures as well.

What do you think has been most influential to your career success?

Initially I think it was the belief that I could do anything if I put my mind to it. When I first started out I would look at other artists work and think "If they can do it, so can I." Not that I thought I was special, but it was the idea that no one else was special either.

I still feel that way. If you really want to learn to draw or paint, you can. It's just a case of wanting it bad enough and being prepared to put the hours in. You need to be a bit obsessed about whatever it is you're trying to do.

I've mostly used LightWave 3D because that's what I'm familiar with, but I've also used Maya and MODO as they're all pretty similar really and I don't think it matters which one you use. It certainly does not matter for illustration or concept art. It all comes down to personal preference. That might be different if you're part of a team and need to be able to share your work with other artists.

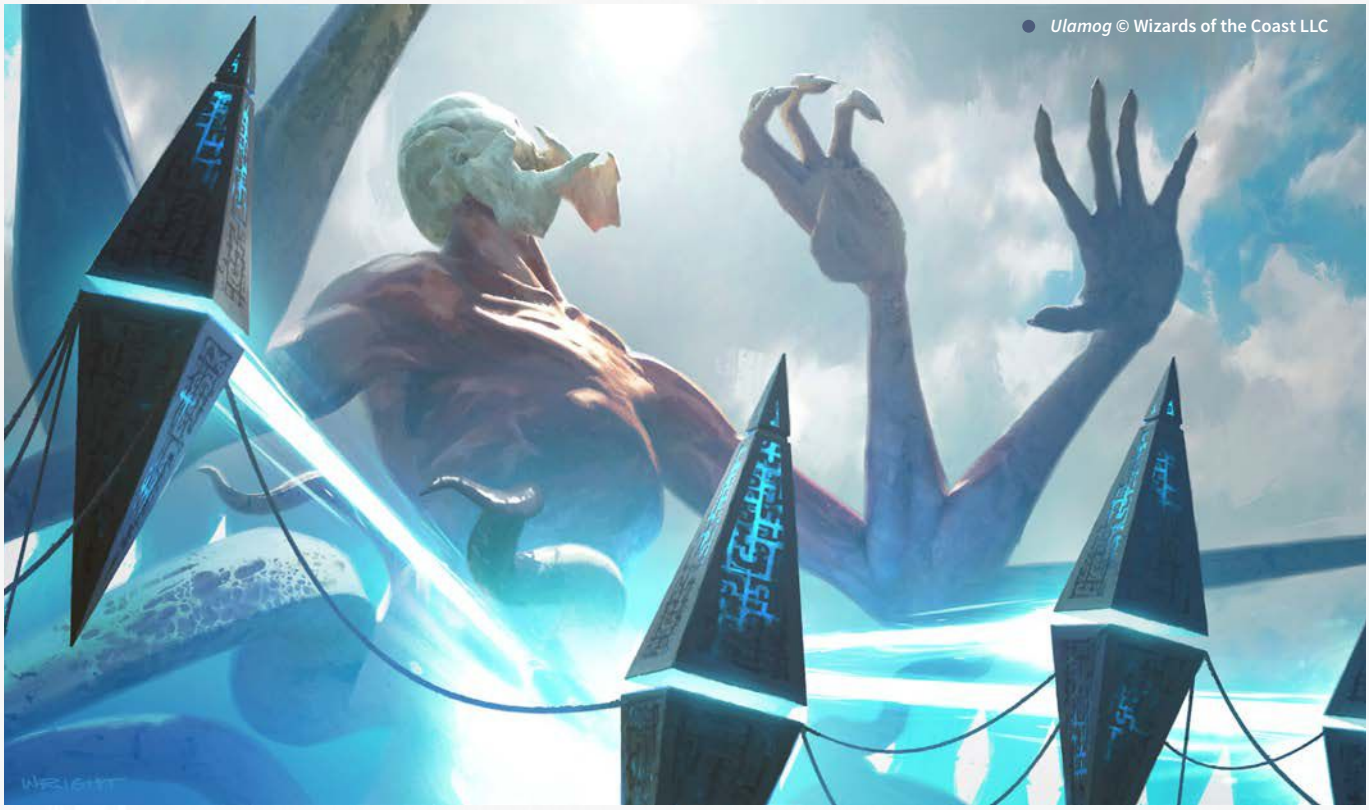
I sometimes use DAZ Studio if I have characters in an image. It's really useful for blocking in a pose but I usually end up replacing the 3D figure with some photo textures. The other thing I find indispensable is Google. I use it to search for reference images, inspiration or finding photo textures for use in Photoshop. I usually spend three-to-four hours just looking for reference images at the beginning of every project.

2da: Which tools and software would like to learn in the future?

RW: At the moment I'm playing with OctaneRender which is really awesome. It is very easy to use and super fast. It's an unbiased, physically correct renderer so the results are very realistic. I'd also like to try 3D-Coat as it looks like it would be a really good place to start when making creature concepts or illustrations. What else... maybe Fusion 360 and Marvelous Designer. There is always something new to try and maybe incorporate in my workflow.

2da: Lighting is very important to your work; do you have any tips for readers who want to work on their lighting effects?

RW: I think the best place to start is to go outside and observe the real world. Go for a walk and look at the way light behaves, how the colors and contrast change depending on the time of day. Take a laptop or tablet with you and make plein air studies. Or you could try real paints! Or maybe just take photos and study them later. ▶



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Pyramid © **Richard Wright**



Phantom Monster © **Wizards of the Coast LLC**

Alternatively, you could try looking for photographs on the internet (that haven't been too heavily Photoshopped) and try to copy them without sampling the colors from it. Once you have finished, see how close you came to matching the original colors. You could maybe spend twenty minutes each day doing this – just keep practicing until you feel you are comfortable.

Another thing I always do is to try and find a photo that can be used for reference when I start a new project. Try to find something that matches the type of lighting you are trying to achieve. Study it and try to incorporate what you see in your painting.

2da: Over the years you have worked on a series of very high profile projects. How have you managed to adapt and develop your skills over the course of these projects?

RW: I probably don't think about it too much in the middle of a project. Sometimes you need to learn something new to solve a specific problem, but most of the time I'm too busy actually doing the work. Of course you're learning all the time; artistic skills or

sensibilities are continually evolving. But between projects I try and learn as much as I possibly can. I will either deliberately try to learn something new by following a tutorial, or learn a whole new piece of software, or sometimes I just want to practice what I already know.

Working on your own painting is a great way to learn; to experiment and try something new. I have a folder full of half finished work. I'll probably never finish most of them but perhaps they've already served their purpose and I learned something from them.

2da: What do you most enjoy about working on a new project?

RW: I usually don't like my work once it's finished, so starting something new is always a positive time for me. A fresh start and a chance to improve on my previous work.

2da: Are there any other areas in the digital art world that you'd like to branch into and why?

RW: I'd really love to write and illustrate a digital book or graphic novel. With animated elements, camera moves and so on. I think that would be really satisfying to create my own characters and worlds.

2da: What initial steps do you take when you are first given a brief for a new project? Do you dive straight ▶

Is there anything you think budding artists should try to avoid?

No, not really. Try everything. See what works and what doesn't. And don't be afraid of making mistakes. Just learn from them.



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Kraken © Wizards of the Coast LLC



Emperors Palace for *Warhammer 40,000* © Games Workshop PLC





City of Haven © Guillotine Games Limited





Ice Village © Richard Wright

into sketching, or do you tend to have a more analytical process?

RW: I guess I have a process that I try and follow each time. I read the brief and download any references the client may have sent over. I'll then make some notes and probably just start scribbling some ideas down in Photoshop – just black-and-white shapes to begin with.

Then I start looking for my own reference images for inspiration, mood, color, or specific images of the subject. Like I mentioned earlier I might spend half a day just looking for references. The next stage really depends on the subject and the reference I've been able to find. If I've already found a photo that's almost perfect, maybe seventy-five percent of the way there, then I'll start with that and just add more photos or just start painting over the top.

If I don't have the perfect photo then I might start by simply painting shapes, working out the composition and forms. I'll work in black and white at first before adding color and textures. That can work well for natural landscapes or for more stylized pieces. If it's a building, cityscape or an interior, I'll almost certainly start blocking something in 3D.

2da: Do you have any tricks or tips to keep yourself motivated on a difficult project?

RW: No, I wish I did. Sometimes it's really difficult to summon the energy or enthusiasm to go and sit in the same room and work on the same image day after day, especially working freelance from home. It's a bit like being in work at the weekend when no one else is around.

One thing that can help is listening to a good audio book, but I can only do that if I'm doing something that doesn't require my full concentration. Often, you just have to make yourself sit down at the computer and get on with it. That usually does the trick. Once you start playing around in Photoshop and start getting into it you lose track of time, and before you know it it's dark outside and you've completed a full day's work.

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?

RW: I'd like to say I'd be outside enjoying the sunshine and fresh air and getting some exercise somewhere beautiful. But in reality I'll probably be playing with some new bit of software, or feeling guilty that I'm not working.

I do enjoy playing videogames, probably a little too much to be honest. If I didn't have to work that's how I'd probably spend most of my time.

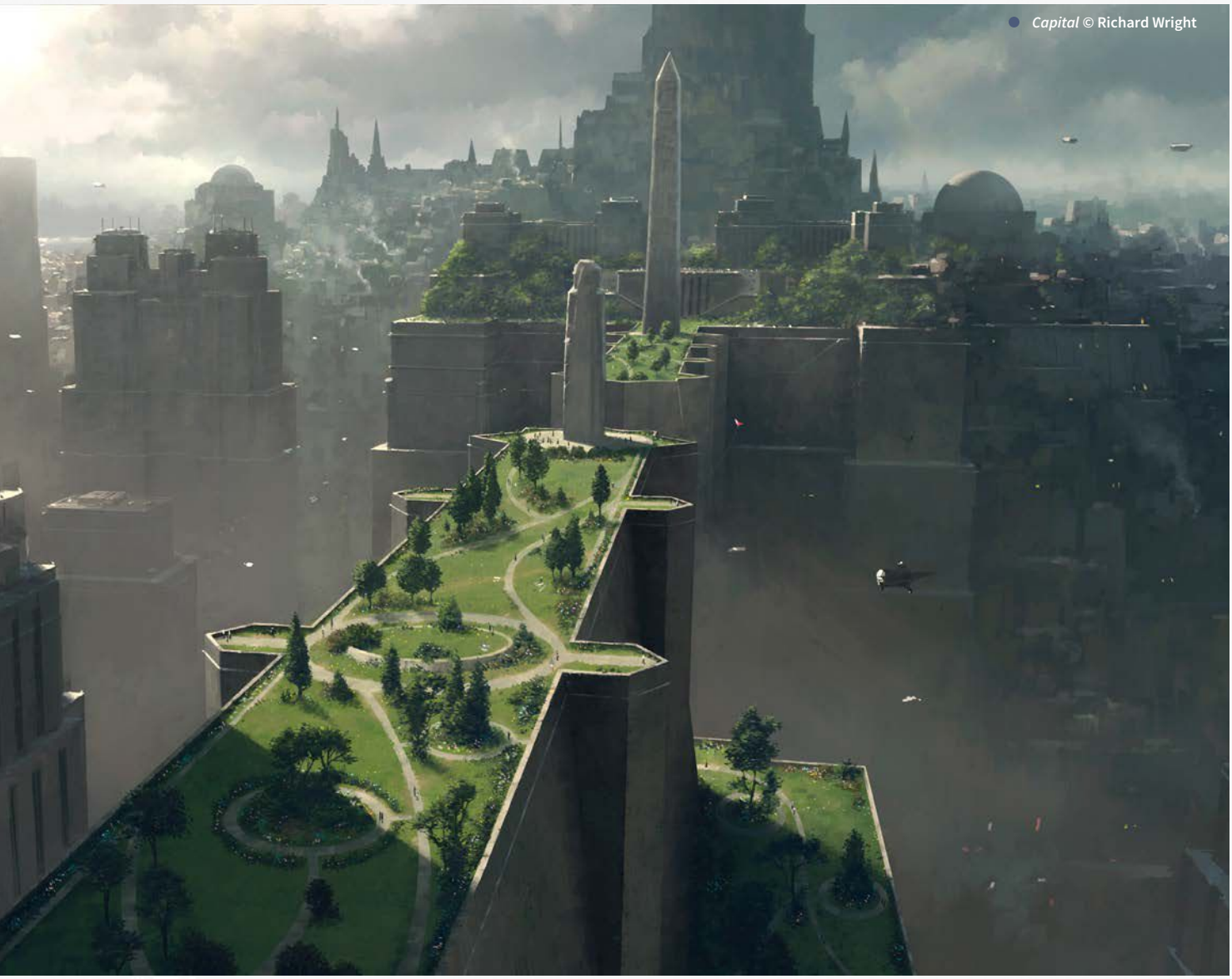
2da: And finally, what should we look out for from you in the future?

RW: Hopefully all of the concept art I've been doing for various videogames over the last two or three years will get released. But that can take a long time. I've done a few book covers recently too. I really want to get back into making some more epic cityscapes. Just for myself. It's probably what I enjoy doing most of all. Maybe I'll try and record the process and release it as a tutorial on Gumroad. ●

Thank you Richard for talking to 2dartist!







Capital © Richard Wright

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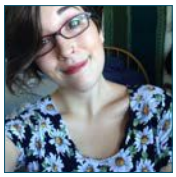




Stylized animation art

Graduate concept and visual development artist Cathleen McAllister showcases her illustrations for games and animation

The Artist



Cathleen McAllister
cathleenconcepts.com

Interviewed by:
Annie Moss

Cathleen McAllister is currently a freelance visual development artist whose past work has included both games and film. Her clients have included Phenom Films, Axis Animation, and Stress Level Zero.

All images © Cathleen McAllister

Specializing in stylized environments, story beat illustrations, and architecture, recent graduate Cathleen McAllister's work embraces color, light, and mood, even in scenes without characters. Cathleen takes inspiration for her environments from the nature and architecture she sees when traveling and hiking in Los Angeles and Seattle. However, she has recently been working on a personal project inspired by *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, in which she has re-imagined Fitzgerald's descriptions while trying to avoid the stylization of the existing adaptations.

In this month's issue of *2dartist*, Cathleen speaks to us about her creative work, and discusses her use of both 2D and 3D software. In addition to working with Photoshop, Cathleen also uses the 3D software MODO because it enables fast and easy lighting, and makes rendering out a scene with correct perspective and depth a simple process. She also talks about her love of plein air painting, and shares her advice for achieving your creative ambitions.

2dartist: Hi Cathleen, thank you for talking to *2dartist*! Can you kick things off by telling us a little bit about yourself and your work?

Cathleen McAllister: I'm a visual development artist, and a recent graduate! I specialize in stylized environments; story beat illustrations, and architecture. I love to work with color, lighting, and mood, even in a scene without characters. My past projects have included working on a game called *Hover Junkers*, and working on two unannounced animated movies.

2da: You specialize in environment design, what is it about this area that you enjoy so much?

CM: I'm greatly inspired by nature and architecture! My family loved to travel and hike when I was little, and I have carried that with me. I still love to travel and go hiking in Los Angeles and Seattle. I'm always attracted to great lighting as well, especially dappled light and sunsets! Another influence on me growing up was set design, especially in movies like *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*. I love telling stories with just the environment alone.

2da: Can you tell us about *The Great Gatsby* project you are working on and what you hope to achieve?

CM: The most beautiful aspect of *The Great Gatsby* is how detailed F. Scott Fitzgerald is when he describes

The basement of the alchemy shop from *The Little Alchemist* project



the setting of the book. The writing itself is very flowery and metaphorical. He paints a picture of an extravagant, over-the-top 1920s New York City, and I saw the potential for beautiful architecture, parties, and mansions.

The story, as bittersweet as it is, also inspired me. For each piece I did, I was inspired by a particular quote. The challenge was to create my own interpretation, while trying to steer clear of the *Gatsby* movies that already exist.

2da: What made you want to pursue a career in the digital art industry?

CM: I wish I had an exciting answer for this, but the truth is that I used to love looking at the digital art tab on DeviantArt. I wanted to learn how to paint digitally, but I had no clue what it was for until I entered college! From then on, I learned what kind of jobs require digital painting.

Is there anything you think budding artists should try to avoid?

I hear a lot of artist advice that is something along the lines of "the only way to be good is with hard work and time!" I find this to be an extremely vague and misleading tip. It's very possible to spend a lot of "time and effort" practicing the wrong thing or using an outdated technique. I think it's important to find an honest, current, and reliable mentor who does exactly what you want to do, and ask them what they did to be successful!

2da: What are generally your preferred tools to work with and why?

CM: I primarily use Photoshop and MODO. Photoshop, aside from being the industry standard, is definitely the best program for painting and sketching digitally!

MODO is my favorite 3D program because it's fast and easy to light, color, and render out a scene with correct perspective and depth. You can quickly change the focal length, angle, and positioning of objects without spending an hour redrawing everything.

Even if I had all the time in the world to redraw in perspective, I would still choose to use 3D because I often have happy accidents in the program that I wouldn't have come up with while drawing!

2da: Are there any tools, techniques or software you would like to explore in the future, and why? ▶



A design sketch for the astronomy tower for Cathleen's *The Little Alchemist* project



An illustration for Cathleen's personal project inspired by F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*





The Locksmith's House, a personal project



> **"One of my favorite parts about school was basically having a team of talented people, whether student or teacher, who could give ideas, suggestions, and critiques to help you keep improving your work"**

CM: I would love to get better at plein air painting in gouache, and possibly try oils! I love to do digital plein airs, but the only thing that stops me is how cumbersome the set-up is, and how difficult it is to get the colors right when there is so much glare on your computer screen!

I see artists with portable painting kits that they can easily travel with, and I'd love to invest time into learning how to paint traditionally. Plein air painting taught me the most about color and natural lighting, and I think it's important for everyone to learn!

2da: Which artist or group of artists particularly inspire your work?

CM: I really admire traditional plein air painters. I always try to see a yearly exhibit here in Los Angeles called the *Masters of the American West*, which exhibits artists like Edgar Paine, Z.S. Liang, and Jeremy Lipking.

I also reference Mike Hernandez, Mark Boedges, Ruo Li, and Scott Christensen. The reason I look up to them so much is because they're so adept at simplifying what they see, and at the same time amplifying the natural lighting and colors.

2da: Where (and when) do you feel you are at your most creative?

CM: I feel most creative when I have people to talk to and bounce ideas off of. One of my favorite parts about school was basically having a team of talented people, whether student or teacher, who could give ideas, suggestions, and critiques to help you keep improving your work. For me, having input and feedback is one of the things I value most, and it helps me be more creative.

2da: Artist block is a problem for many creative people. Can you share a couple of tips you use when the inspiration stops flowing?

CM: I didn't experience this until senior year of college, when it became challenging to finish paintings. I was dragging myself through to the finish, trying to just get things done for my senior show.

Unfortunately, there was no option to take a break or do something else! Work can often be similar; you must finish the project or painting, and the work doesn't wait for your artist's block to pass. I had to find ways to keep myself inspired!



An illustration for Cathleen's personal project *Cave Girl*

I love listening to audio books, or podcasts like *The Collective*, and music while I work. I also try to look through Tumblr, ArtStation, and Instagram at some of my favorite artist's works, and also to look at nature, architecture, and travel photography.

2da: What has been the project you have most enjoyed working on?

CM: Unfortunately, I can't talk about the content of the movies I've worked on in the past year. But I can say that I've done a lot of architecture and mood pieces, and I can't wait to share the end result when they do come out!

One of my favorite parts of working on an animated movie is the amount of design work that needs to go into everything, and how conceptual those designs can be.

On my *Great Gatsby* project, for example, it was a challenge to ask myself, "What does an art deco chandelier look like in a stylized world?" Because in animation, you don't have to worry as much about realism, construction costs, or physical limitations, the possibilities are endless! ▶



PRO TIPS

Have an end goal

My best teacher in college had us write down a list of five studios we wanted to work for, and he would help us gear our work towards that. I think that this is important advice for everyone!

Look at the artists who work at your favorite studios and try to reach their level of finish. Your goal is to have a style that is compatible with your favorite studio, but still unique. For example, every artist at Disney has a unique style, but they are all compatible because there is something that makes their artwork similar!

Utilize your tools

Photoshop and 3D are powerful tools. There is nothing wrong with using every tool available. That means, utilizing layers and blending modes. Utilize different brushes that get the job done. Experiment and familiarize yourself with every tool possible in Photoshop! A lot of great breakthroughs happen by accident.

In MODO, utilize the powerful, real-time lighting. There is even an option to emulate the sun! There is nothing wrong with using every tool available to your advantage, and you should not feel ashamed of your process.



Cathleen's depiction of the green light described in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*





An illustration for *The Little Alchemist* a personal project

2da: What initial steps do you take when you are first given a brief for a new project? Do you dive straight in or do you have a more analytical process?

CM: Before I even begin sketching, I immediately go to Google and find as many inspirational references as possible. If they've given me a time period in a specific country, I may even research it on Wikipedia.

The first step for me is finding reference that sets the tone and gives me some context, then I may look for more specifics. Only after I've found great reference and feel more comfortable do I start sketching. I generally do black-and-white composition sketches first, either in line or in grayscale, and then I do a 3D block-in in MODO.

I like to find an interesting lighting shape, direction, and color in MODO before I begin painting in Photoshop. I view this step as another part of the sketching process, but I find it extremely vital.

You're able to play with depth and perspective much faster in 3D than in a sketch. If you want to change the camera angle, it's simple, and it allows you to experiment without being trapped by your sketch! Once I take the 3D into Photoshop, the 3D virtually disappears and I try to reincorporate the looseness and gesture of my initial sketches over the 3D as I begin painting.

2da: How do you keep yourself motivated when working on a difficult project?

CM: I try to remind myself of the end result. I like to look at other artists to see the level of finish I want to achieve, and so when I feel stressed, I have an end goal in mind.

Another thing I always do on a painting, every time I open the file, is make a new layer on top and give the image a quick paint-over, or else write myself notes in red. Many of my Photoshop files have several layers on top, with a few areas circled that say "Finish this!" or "Fix that!" I find this to be very important in a detailed piece, where it can be easy to overlook little areas.

2da: When you're not working hard on your art, what do you like to do with your time?



CM: I love to hike, travel, and bike! I also collect bugs that I find.

2da: Finally, where will we be able to see your work next? Are there any projects we should look out for?

CM: A few of the projects I've worked on are still unannounced, but a game I worked on last summer has been released! It is a virtual reality game called *Hover Junkers*, a post-apocalyptic ship-flying game.

Thank you Cathleen for chatting to 2dartist!

If you could write a letter to your younger self, just starting out as an artist, what advice would you give?

Unfortunately, I didn't even know that concept art existed until I was a sophomore in college. I wish I could have told myself: "Hey you know all those animated movies you like? Someone had to concept and design everything in that movie."

In high school, I was planning on going into environmental science or biology. At the end of senior year though, I realized I probably would be happier doing art! I know a lot of people who did college prep, and I wish I had done that! I would have wasted a lot less time in college knowing my direction.



The Artist



Ivan Meshkov
behance.net/imeshkov

Ivan Meshkov is a freelance illustrator and fine artist from Chelyabinsk, Russia. He works as a 2D artist in a game studio but likes to draw with paper, inks and paints in his spare time.

A R T I S T S P O T L I G H T

Gothic-inspired illustration

Illustrator and fine artist Ivan Meshkov discusses the inspirations behind his traditional drawings

All images © Ivan Meshkov

Inspired by the work of traditional art masters such as Albrecht Dürer and Gustave Doré, and also the work of tattoo artists Thomas Hooper and Alexander Grim, artist Ivan Meshkov creates stunning illustrative works.

His drawings, formulated in a moleskin sketchbook, commonly feature skulls, weaponry, wild animals and historical symbolism. His compelling work has a dark, somber tone which has led to creating detailed artwork for the album covers of metal bands.

This month, Ivan displays some of his favorite works and the illustration which is most significant to him.

We also speak to Ivan about how he is influenced by the world around him, the inspiration behind his some of his most popular artworks, and his latest projects.

2dartist: Hi Ivan! Thanks for talking to *2dartist*. First, could you introduce yourself to readers who don't know your work?

Ivan Meshkov: Hi, I'm thirty years old and I'm from Russia. I am a 2D artist in a game studio. In my free time I like to draw for myself and to my own schedule; sometimes doing freelance work.

2da: What or who encouraged you to take up a career as an artist?

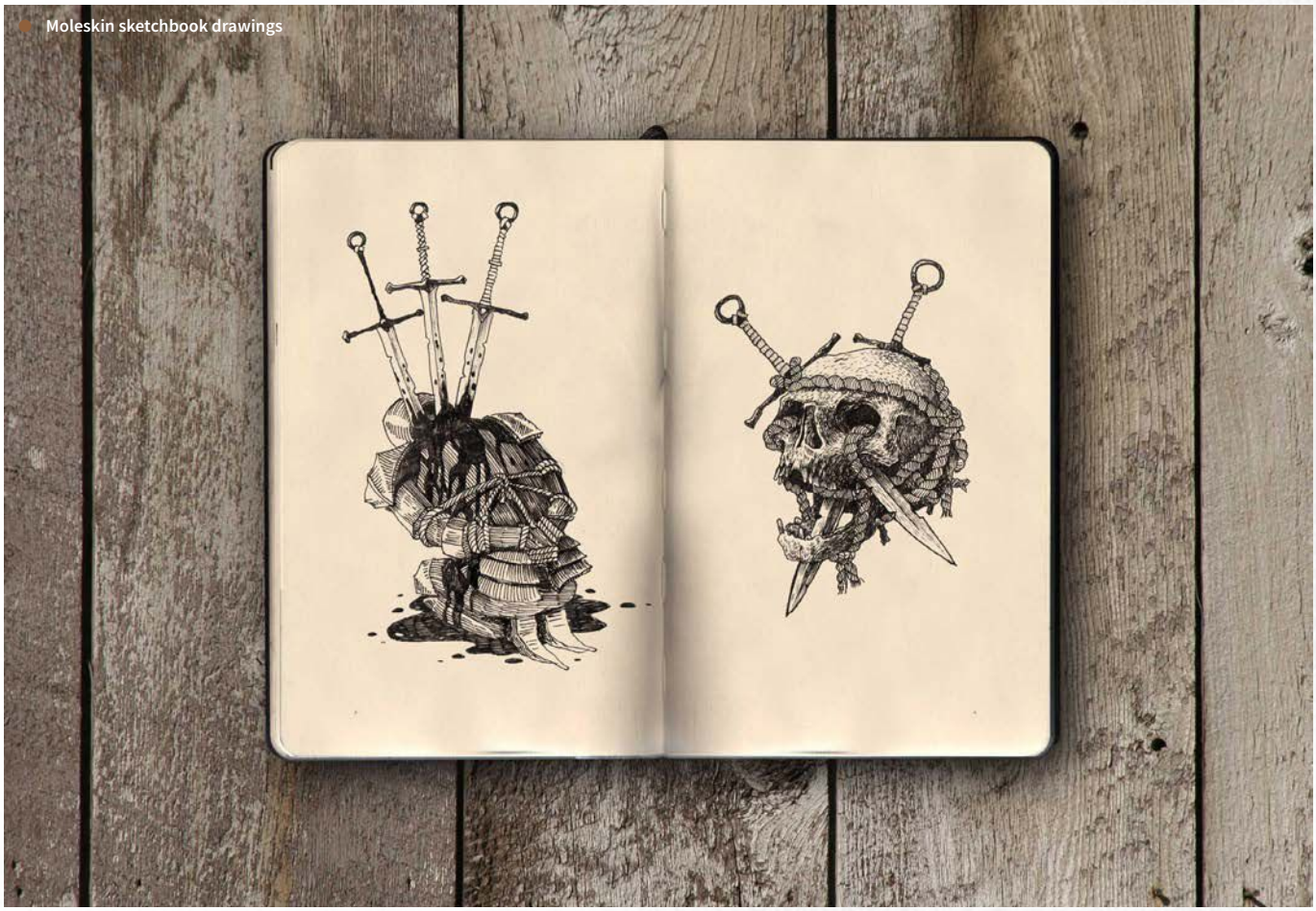
IM: I loved to draw in childhood. I've always liked the old artists, especially Gustave Doré's engravings, and the work of Albrecht Dürer among others. They have inspired me. ▶



Untitled **album cover illustration**



Crosses



Moleskin sketchbook drawings



Moleskin sketchbook drawings

2da: Where do you look for inspiration? Are there any artists you like to reference?

IM: As I said, I am inspired by the old masters. I like prints, medieval armor and weapons, art tattoos, symbols and signs, Gothic architecture. My favorite artists are Gustave Doré, Albrecht Dürer, Hieronymus Bosch, Franklin Booth of the contemporary artist Nicolas Delort, Richey Beckett, as well as tattoo artists Thomas Hooper and Alexander Grim, and many others.

2da: What has had the biggest impact on your work to date? Was there an important turning point in your career?

IM: Basically what I see around me, on the internet, in books, in the people around me, and the artists that inspire me. I think the turning point in my career is still to come.

2da: What advice can you give to our readers who want to develop their drawing techniques?

IM: Look at the work of other artists, but do not try to simply copy them. Draw every day, to try to find your own style, and learn new things through trial and error.

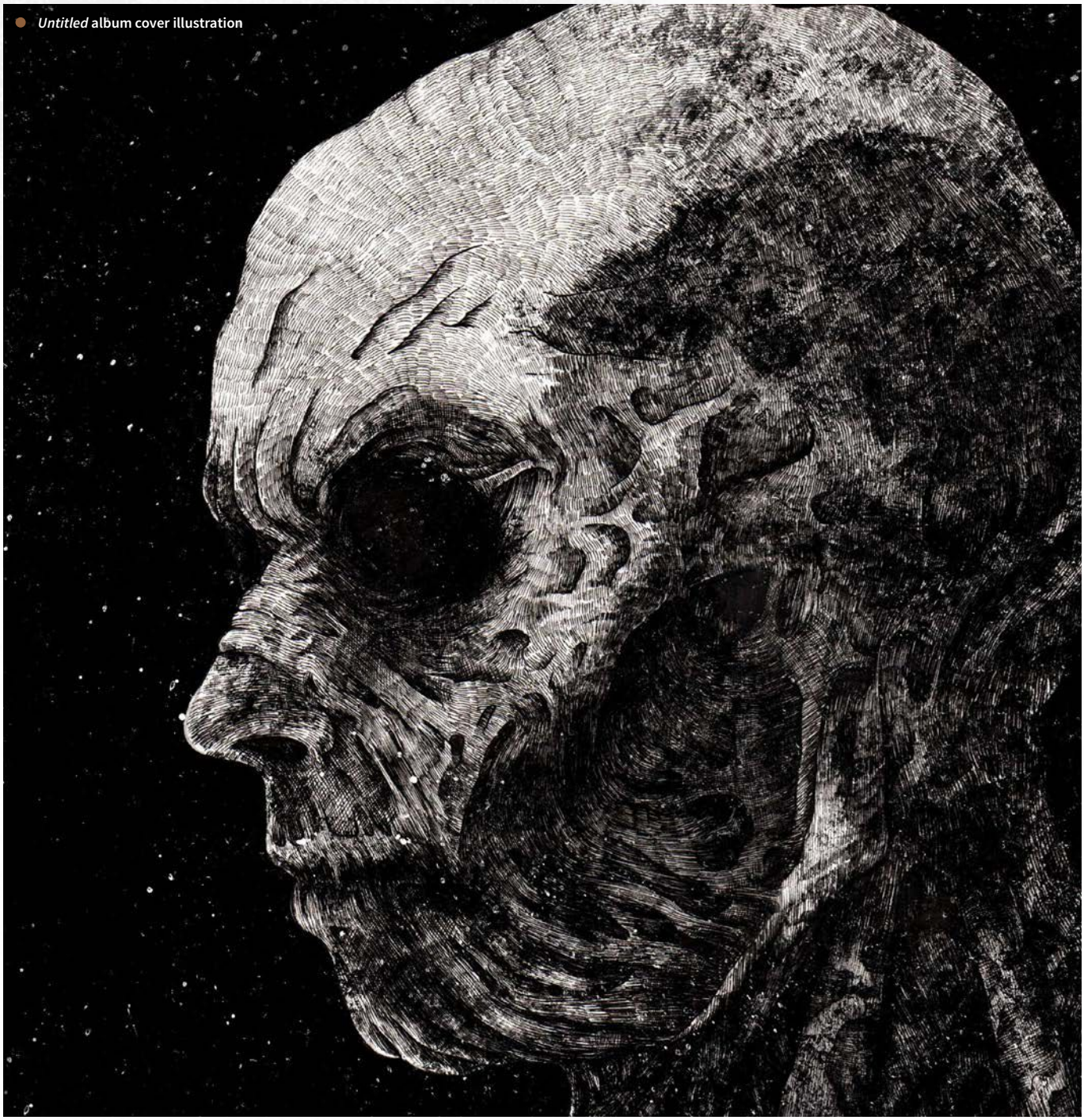
2da: What are your preferred tools to work with and why?

IM: I love to paint with my hands, as I do not like drawing on the tablet. Recently I have been using isograph and paint on paper. I also want to try to paint with watercolors in the future.

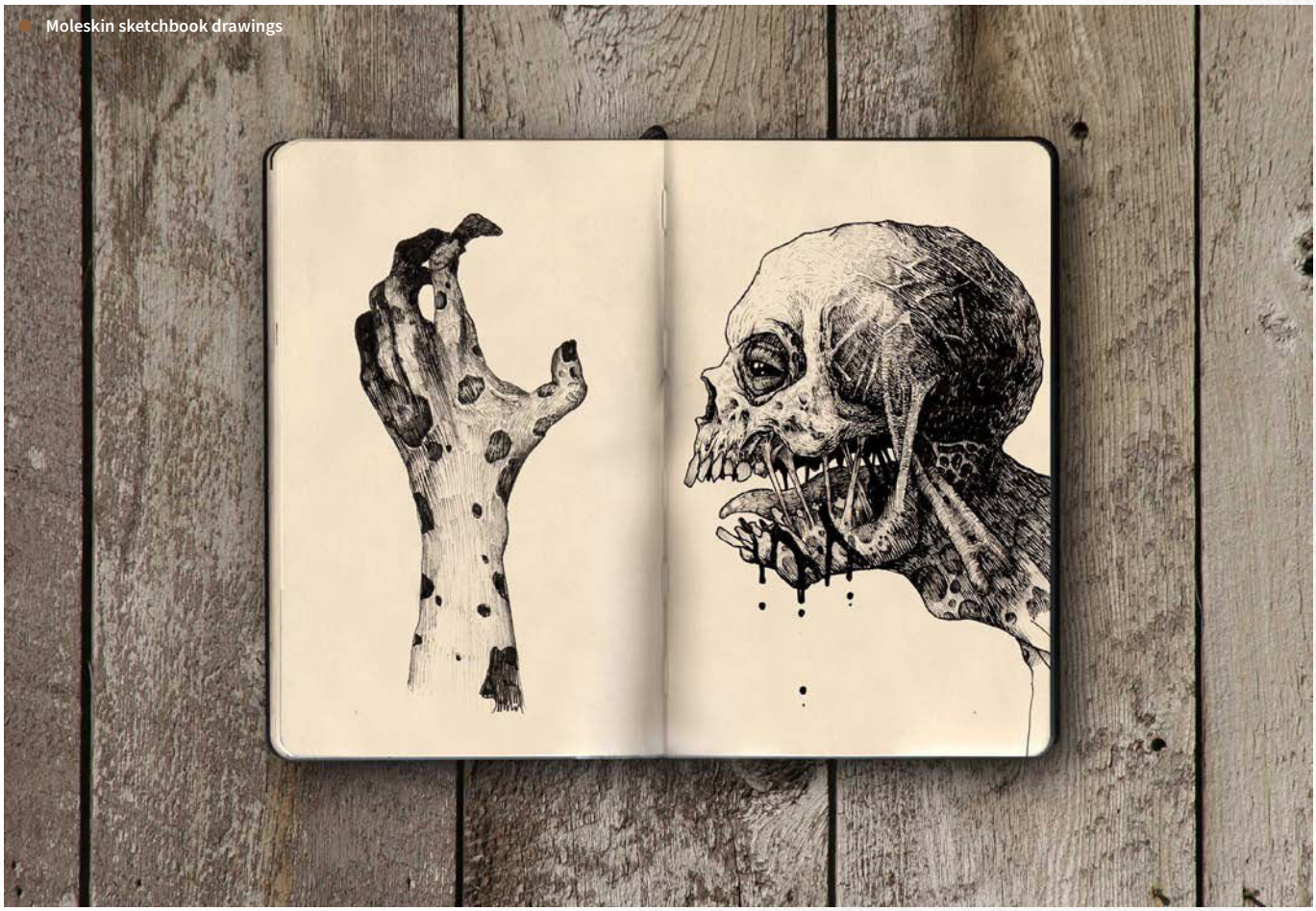
2da: Do you have a particular place you like to go to draw? Do you create your works in a studio, at home or out in nature?

IM: I draw only while at home, in the kitchen, where there is a big table and no one tends to bother me.

2da: What has been your favorite project to work on so far? ▶



Untitled **album cover illustration**



Moleskin sketchbook drawings



Moleskin sketchbook drawings


VIII

IM: One of my favorite projects to work on was *Five Kings* which I drew about five years ago, then I began to print it on a T-shirt. This drawing was inspired by the film *300*. There is a scene with an envoy from the Persians where a character has a bunch of skulls in his hands, so I liked this scene and I immediately sat down to draw.

2da: How do you deal with a challenging project? Do you have any tips for our readers?

IM: Here is a small piece of advice: start with routine work, such as background, clouds, or environment. The most interesting place is at the end of the work, so this way you will not lose interest in your job until the end.

2da: Are there any other skills and techniques you would like to learn in the future? Are there any materials you would like to experiment with?

IM: I would like to try to paint with watercolors. It is also interesting to me to try scratchboard (a form of illustration using knives and etching tools to draw into an ink coated board) which is a new technique for me.

2da: What has your experience as a freelance artist been like? What lessons have you learned?

IM: Keep positive all the time, try to understand the customer and do everything with pleasure.

2da: What does your average working day usually look like?

IM: In the morning I go to the gym, then I go to work. I draw most of the day on the tablet and in the evening I draw for myself or do freelance.

2da: How do you like to spend your time when you aren't creating beautiful art?

IM: I spend time with my family and playing with my daughter. I go in for sports, I read books, and play computer games. I also listen to music.

2da: And finally, what can we look forward to from you next?

IM: Now I am drawing a cover for a metal band, it's a lot of work with a lot of detail. I think it will be finished at the end of the month. I have also started to paint a series of pictures with an octopus. For my new work, that can be followed on Behance or Tumblr. ●

Thank you Ivan for taking the time to speak to 2dartist today!

IVAN'S SIGNIFICANT ARTWORK

I have chosen *Crossed arms with tattoos*. This is one of the first works of mine which gained great popularity on the internet, so it is so important to me.



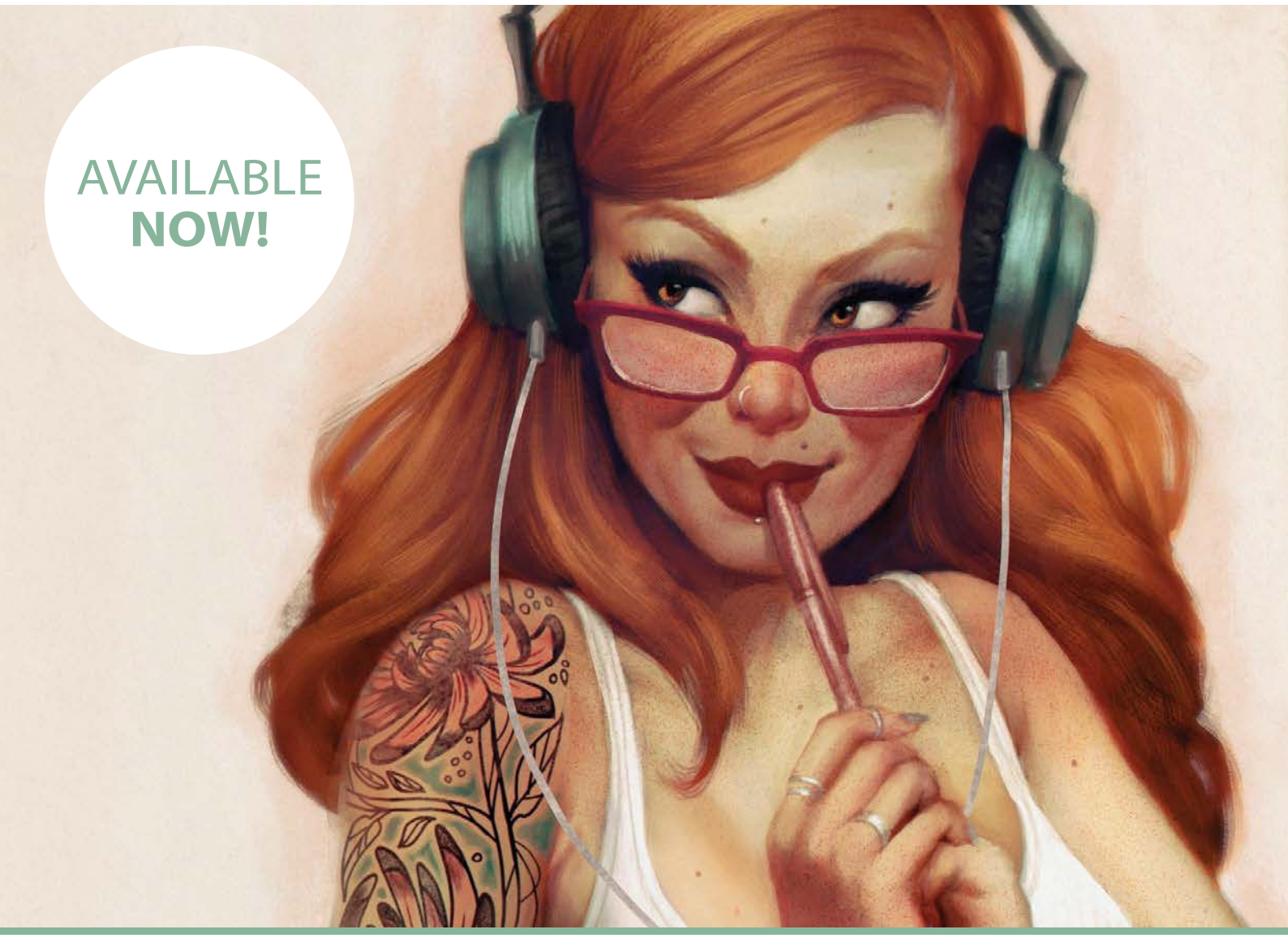


Moleskin sketchbook drawings



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Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!

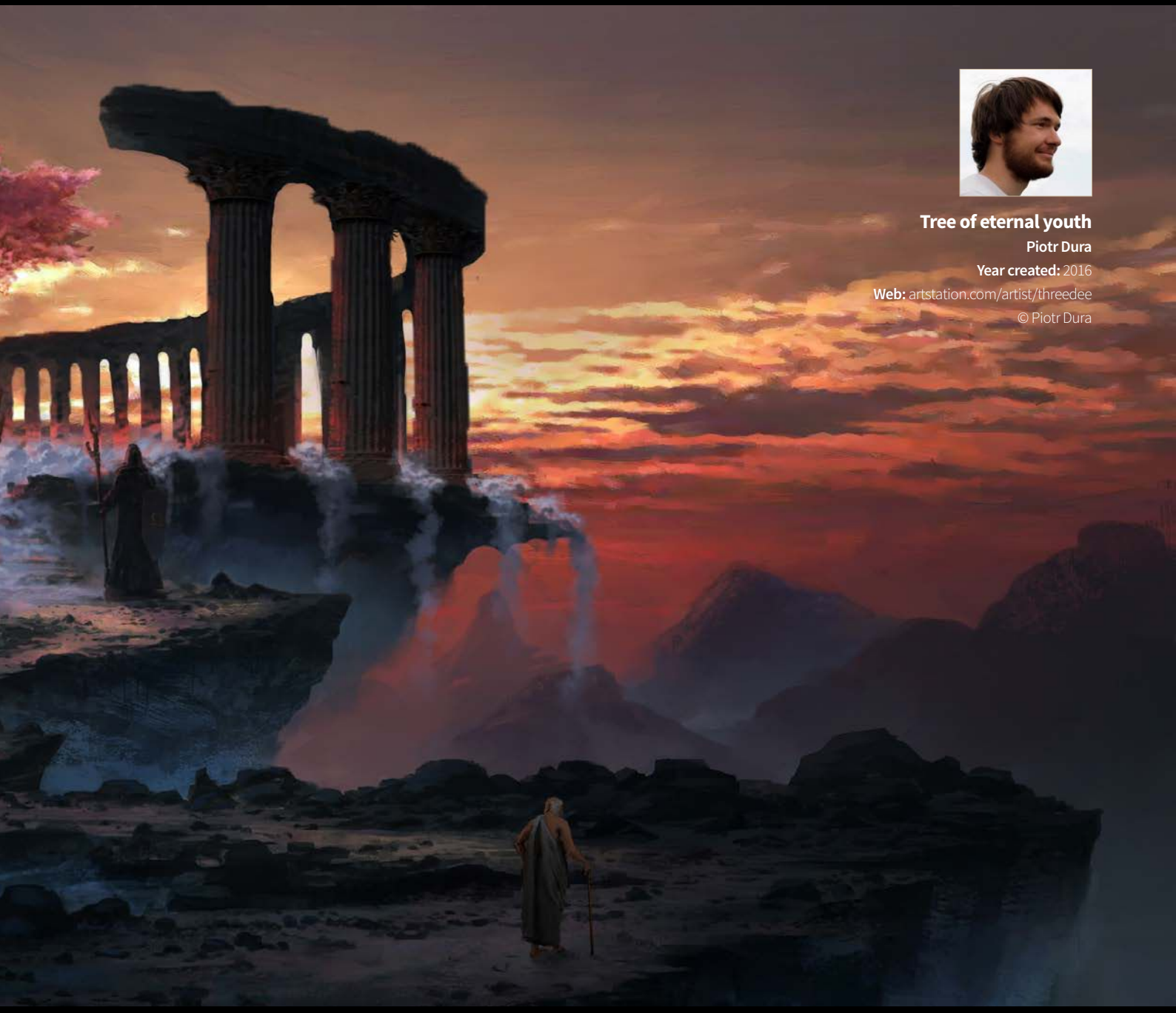


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Tree of eternal youth

Piotr Dura

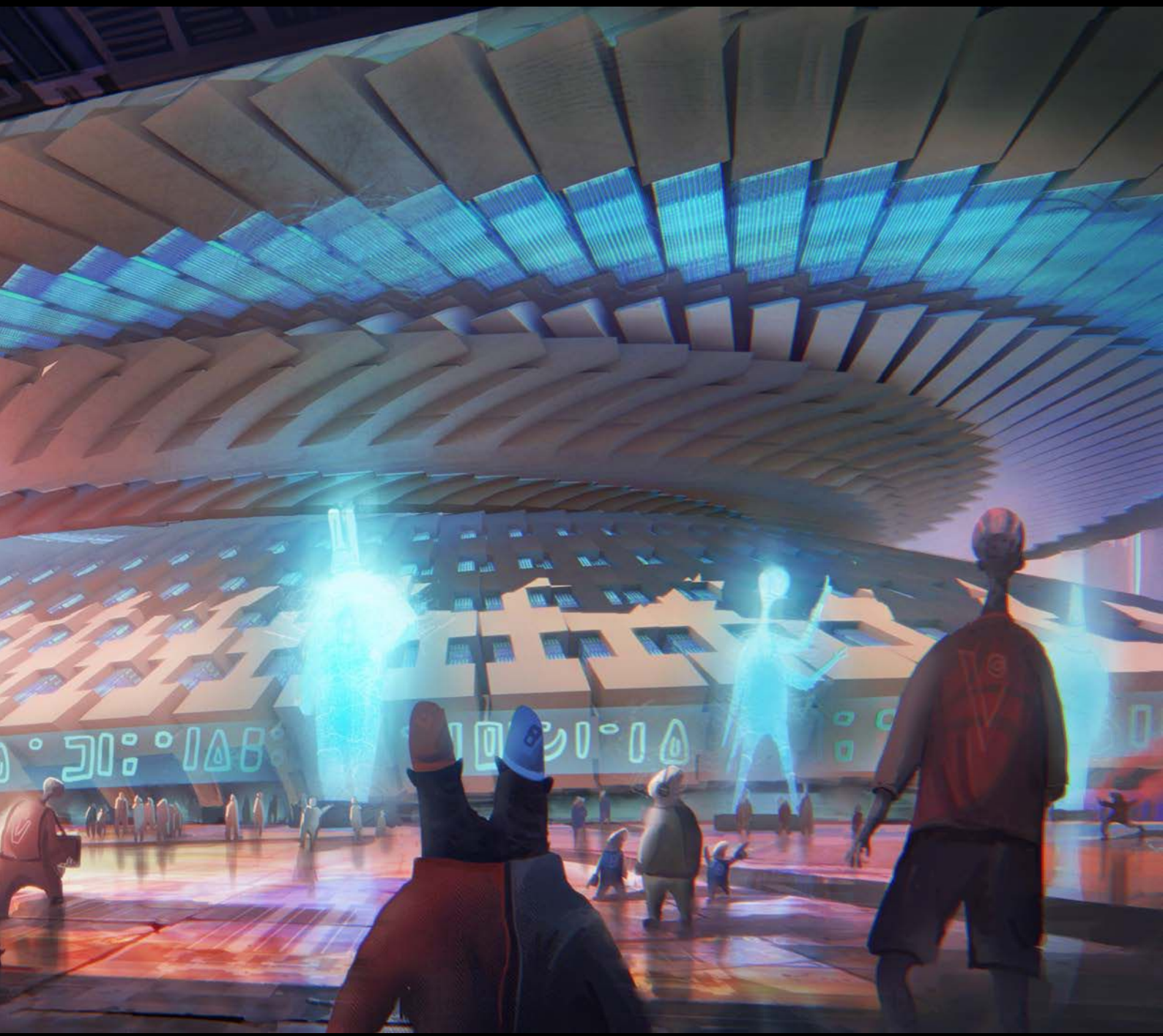
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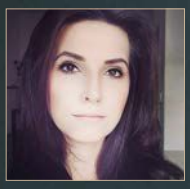
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The long journey home

Tom Lopez

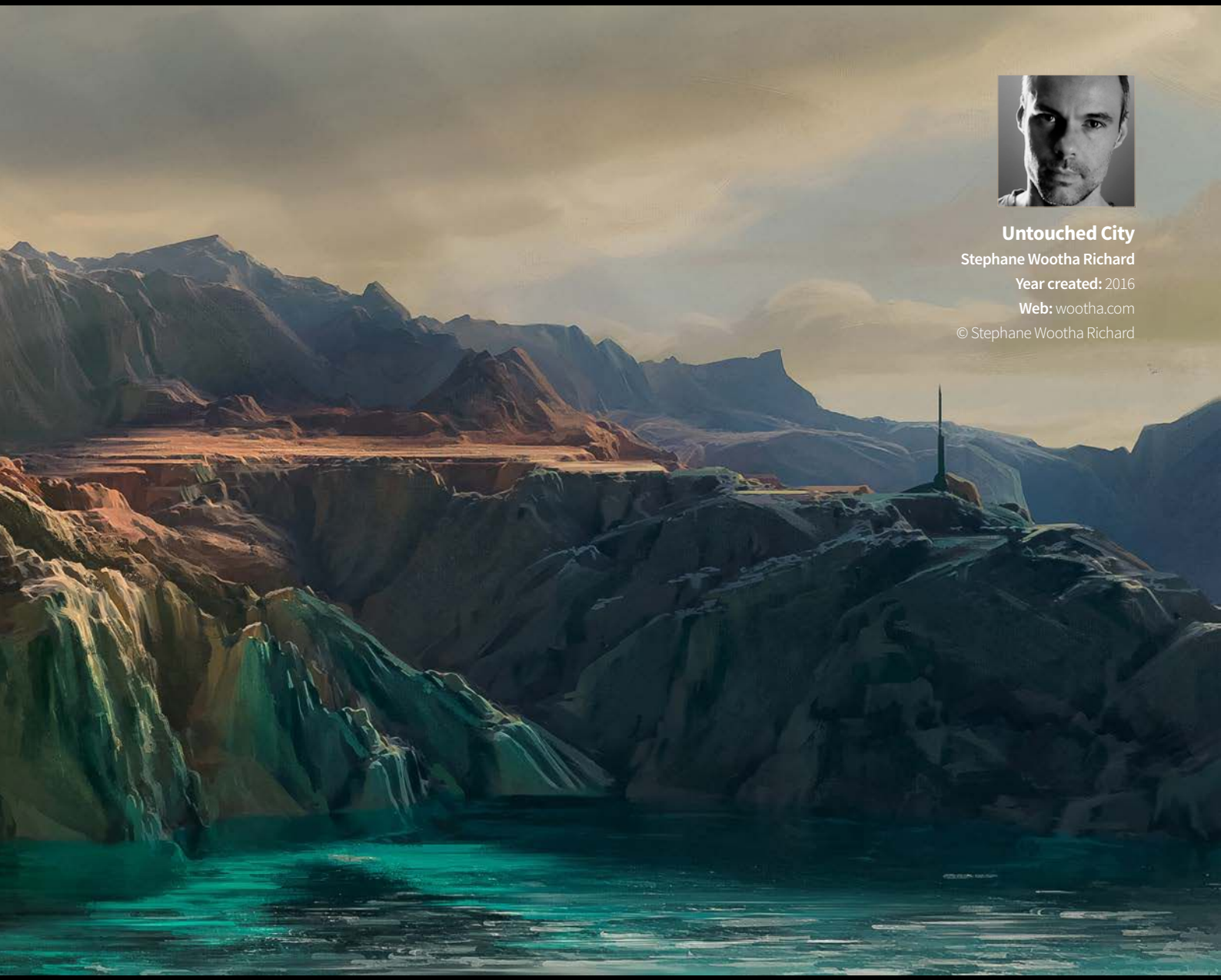
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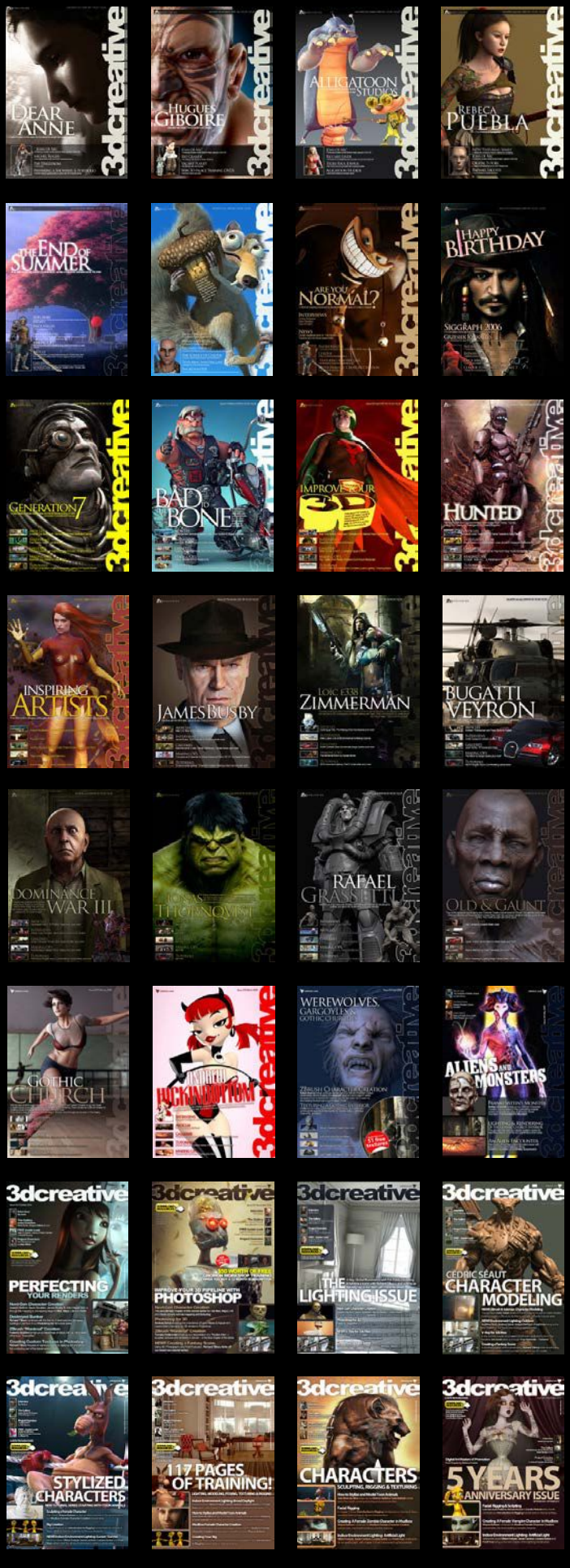
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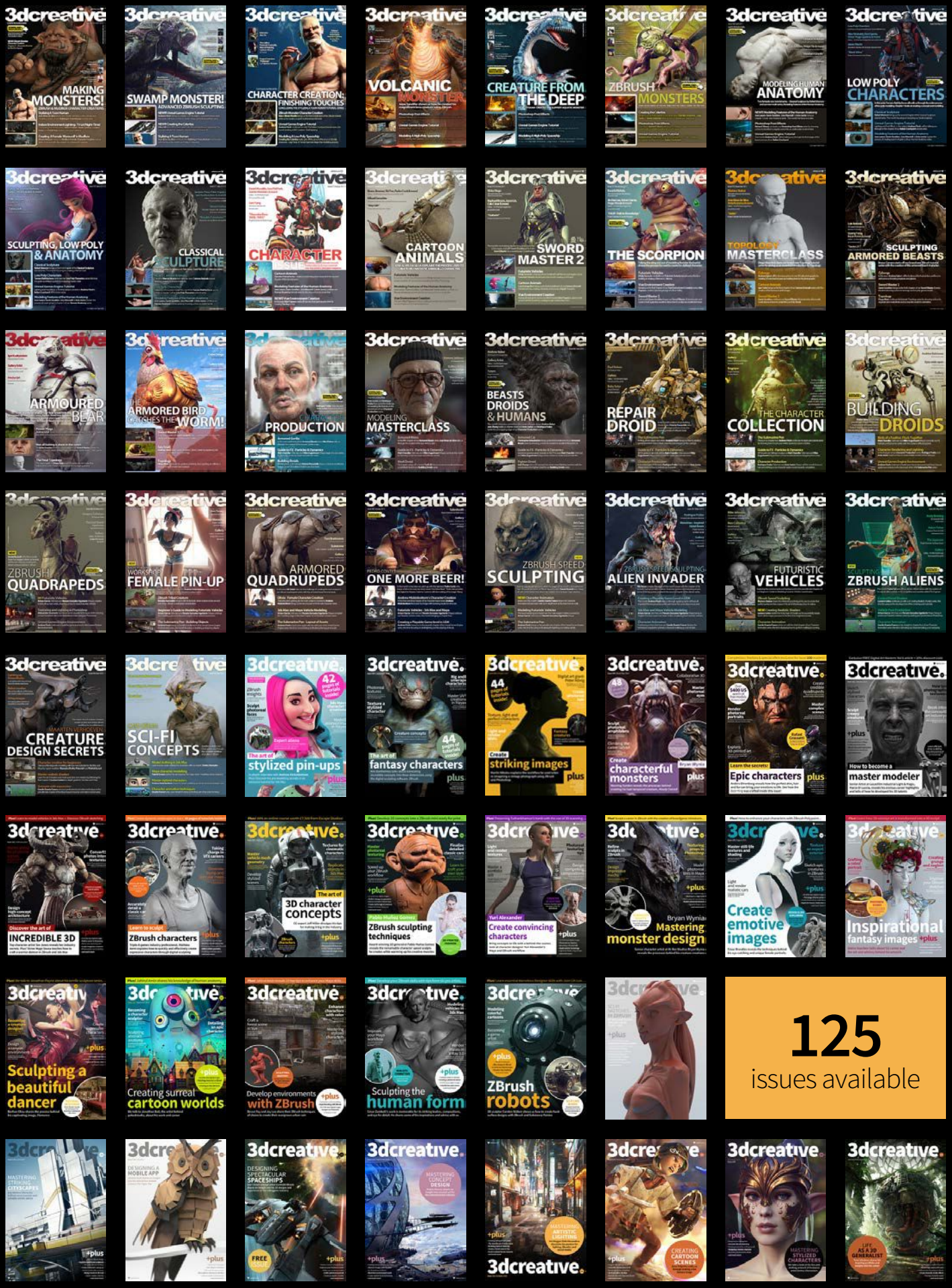
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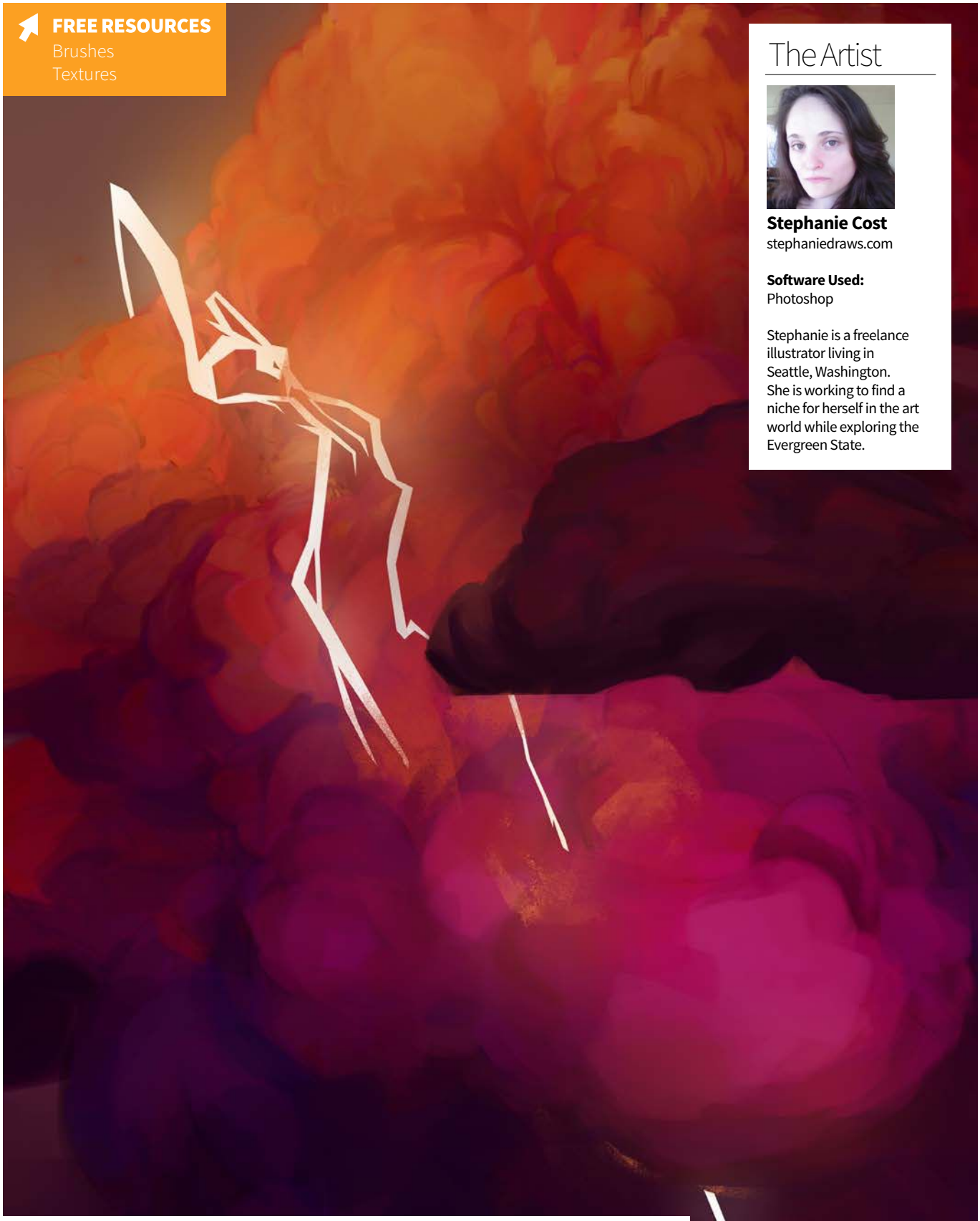
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The Artist

Stephanie Cost
stephaniedraws.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Stephanie is a freelance illustrator living in Seattle, Washington. She is working to find a niche for herself in the art world while exploring the Evergreen State.

Speed paint an abstract storm

Stephanie Cost shows you how to create a painterly atmospheric speed painting using unconventional custom brushes

Find out how to use a bright color palette to paint an atmospheric scene…

In this tutorial I'll be walking you through the process of using experimentation to make decisions about perspective, color palettes, and mood when painting an atmospheric image. We will be using abstraction as well as careful use of reference photography. Although I utilize different tools and blending layer options in Photoshop, this approach is suited to anyone with a traditional painting background, and has a heavy focus on fundamental tenets like value structures and composition. One of my favorite aspects of making art is the selection of colors, and I'll explain it in length for this tutorial, where I take an image through stages of muted color palettes to bright and lurid palettes, and finally to the balance in the middle.

Without using man-made elements, or even a horizon line, *Tropical Storm* is an exploration in achieving a specific emotion with a piece that is very abstract. If you struggle with limited shape language or drawing organic forms, you can download the reference photographs and brushes that I use here, and follow along as I create fantastical clouds out of floating boxes, leaves, and bushes. Even atmospheric effects require an anchor in realistic perspective and weight, but by going from collage and abstraction to simple, and finally complex shapes, we are free to explore and have fun painting dramatic phenomena. When we learn to see everything around us as resources for future paintings, our shape vocabulary and understanding of color expands exponentially. By being bold in our approach we can better convey boldness itself.

01 **Exploration and ideas:** As I start a new piece, I do a lot of research and draw a page or two of rough thumbnails. From these I now have a general idea of what mood I want to aim for, and some possible abstract configurations I can use.

For this piece I have the idea of a dramatic scene of heavy clouds, and I want the feeling of weight to come across through colors and mark making. The beginning should be playing and having fun – don't try too hard. Block in some contrasting purples and yellows and try to think about any areas which might cause problems later on.

Think about the lightning as it is the focal point of the composition, and how you can build the scene around it without taking away the viewer's attention. You want to build atmosphere and drama but still try to keep things nice and loose. Use the textured brushes from the downloadable content to push the colors around the canvas.

02 **Adding weight:** You don't need to use too many layers here as you want to be bold and fearless with your mark making. Use a narrow brush to draw in rough shapes, and try alternating between soft, painterly marks and ones that emulate drawing with a pencil to achieve as much definition and planning as possible – remember that you are aiming for a painterly style which is finely balanced between controlled and loose.

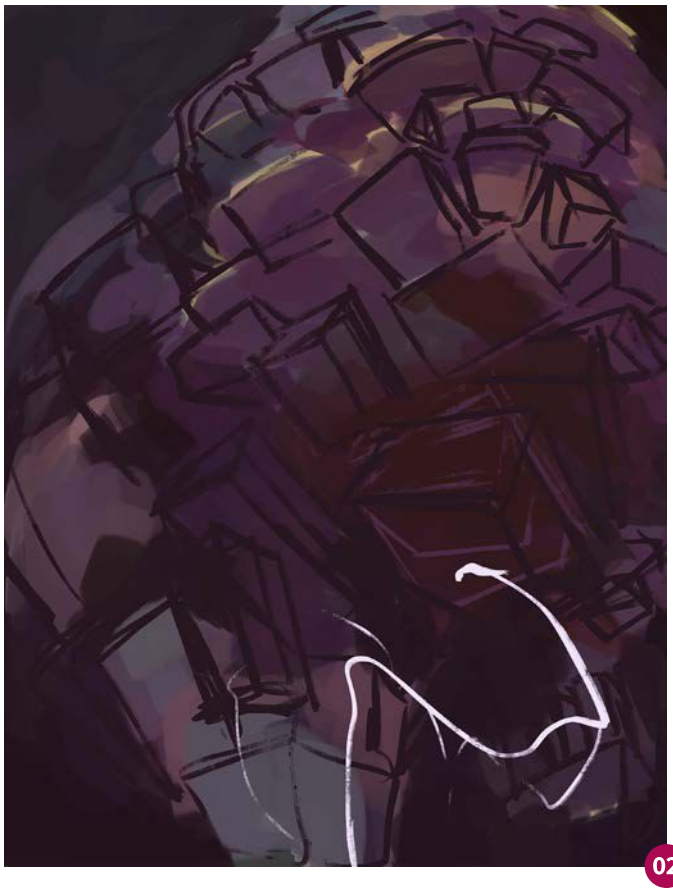
Break up the image in shapes that have correct perspectives. A working knowledge of perspective is sometimes all that is required for atmospheric, semi-abstract pieces such as this one. I don't use a grid, but just sketch in an organized fashion using big and small shapes, but a grid might be useful to you if you are not confident at capturing the look you want. It's important to establish drama as soon as possible. ▶

01 **Start with a very loose, blocky approach when creating your grayscale thumbnails**

02 **Study perspective, understand that nearby objects will be large and isolated; the opposite will be true for distant elements**



01

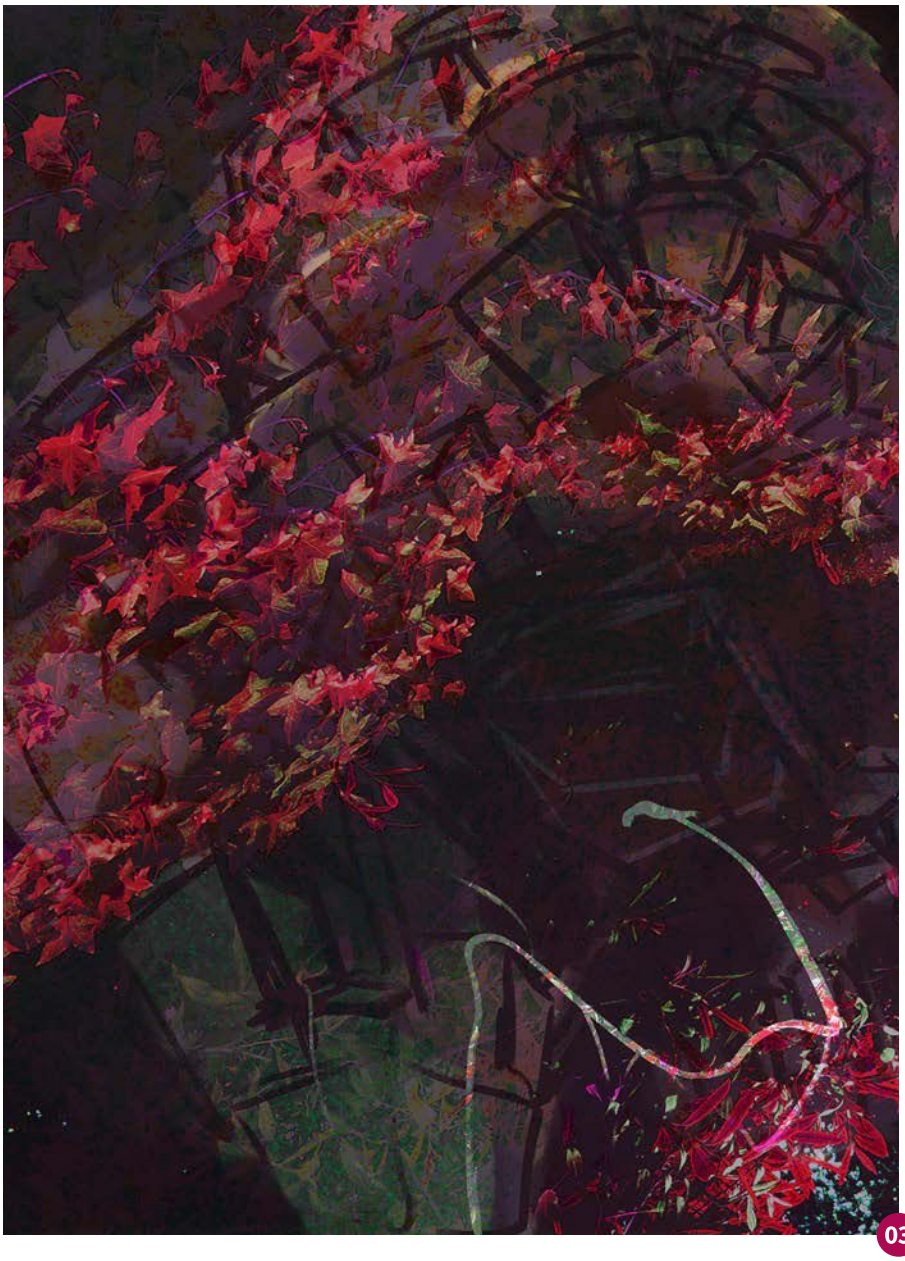


02

03 **Finding and creating color palettes:** Everyone is drawn to different types of color palettes, and every artist tackles color in different ways. I love to discover potential color combinations through exploration, which is what I do here. This is one of my favorite steps of any painting; unexpected, rich, and complex color palettes can be pulled from any source.

Try taking your own reference photographs and using them as Photoshop overlays: in this case I import a photograph of a bush and adjust the Hue/Saturation sliders (Ctrl+U) to get a lurid reddish/green color palette. Set this layer to Pin Light and decrease the Fill a bit until you are satisfied with the look. Experiment with the placement and rotation of the image. Play with layers to discover new colors and ways to achieve your chosen mood. In the image you can see the bright spots of red up against the dark purple already give the painting a storm-like appearance.

04 **Abstract planning:** For this step you should still focus on color and abstract structures – you want to create a large dominating composition with weight. Use a wedge-shaped brush, set to 100% Opacity and Fill, to block in the rough blocks from the previous step. The background needs to be a dark, matte background, so color-pick from different areas of your piece to isolate interesting colors that you created with the Pin Light layer. In Color Dynamics in the Brush panel, set the brush Spacing to 19%, check Transfer, as well as a tiny percentage of Hue Jitter. All of these settings will help you pick new colors that pop and catch the viewer's eye. For variety in size, space out larger blocks toward the viewer's eye line and crunch together small forms on top.



03

PRO TIP

Looking to organic references

With the internet making reference-gathering so easy, it's always tempting (and practical) to go to Google to find royalty-free images to use as references and photo texture overlays, but there is always the risk of these images being used by so many artists that they become predictable, and when searching for a tricky perspective angle it can be time-consuming and frustrating hunting down imperfect reference. Take your own photographs. Almost anything from nature can also look like a cloud. Plants, hair, rocks, riverbanks, animal fur, crystals – really anything organic has unique and yet similar ways their planes and forms overlap.





04

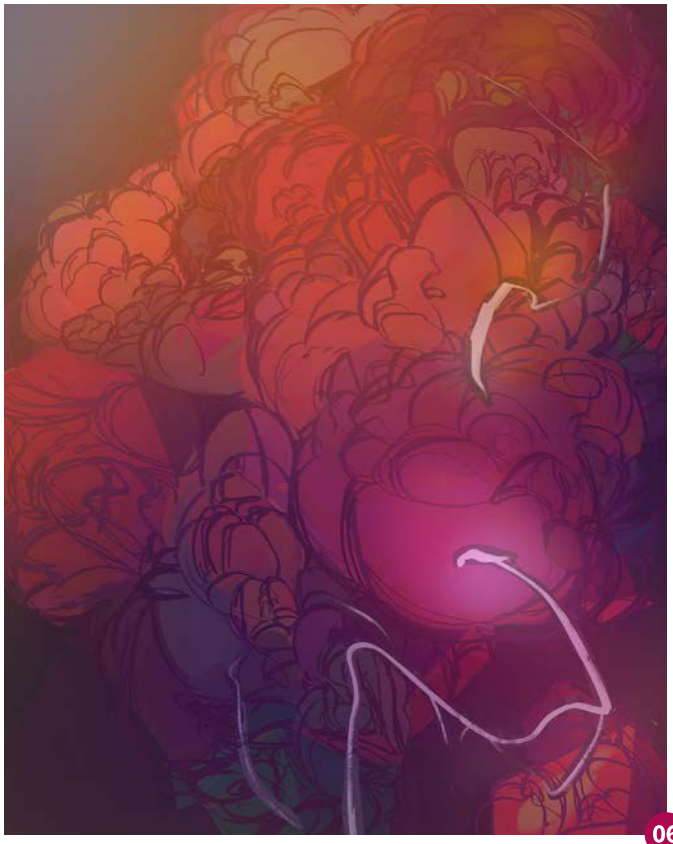


05

05 **References and shape language:** Switch between a narrow wedge brush and soft rectangular brush from the first step, to first soften the harsh corners and edges of the blocks with the spongy brush and then define new and billowing forms that "ghost" around them. By going back and forth between these two methods, which mimic painting and drawing respectively, you start to build up tiers of weighty cloud masses and linking them together organically. To avoid repeating predictable and uniform (and therefore boring) shapes, look at the reference photograph from the downloadable – this also is good for pulling out ideas for shape language. Try using unconventional references and observing nature through the lens of your art; trees, rocks, and clouds all develop organically and their forms layer and bunch together in similar ways. Another thing to do now is to plan where the lightning (the focus) could go, and how it interacts with my masses.

06 **Color and atmosphere:** Now that you have defined the planes and forms it is time to turn your attention to mood and atmosphere. Rough linework and choppy shapes can easily become unorganizable, especially with the variety of lurid colors that you have been using so far. Take a quick screen-capture of your working image and open it in another file.

Repeat this six or so times to test out different options, and use an airbrush to try different palettes (use predominately blues, yellows, or pinks). Compare them to decide which direction you want to take the piece. In this case I used an airbrush with highly saturated blues and oranges – which are complementary colors and create tension, even when applied softly. Set your airbrush layer to around 60% Fill to unify all the colors and shapes beneath. ▶



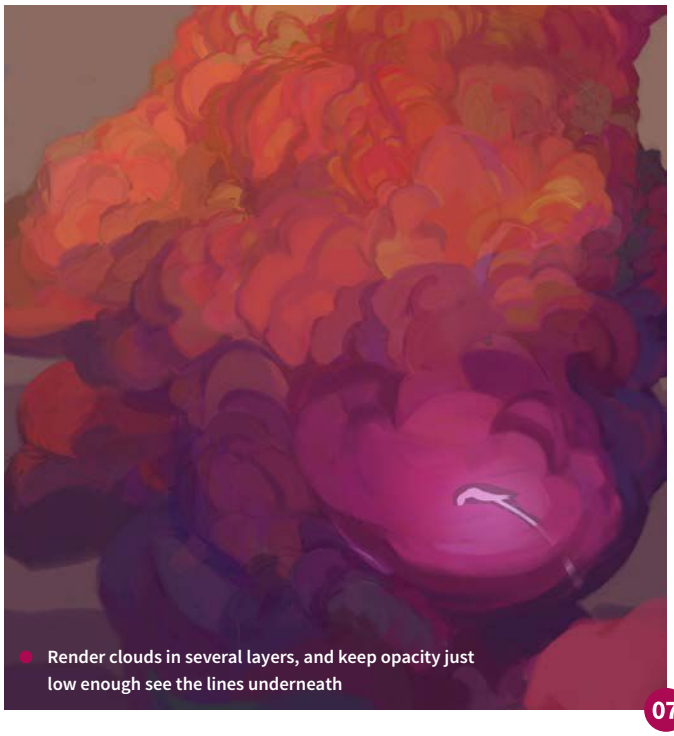
06

03 **The possibilities for photo overlays are endless – Stephanie leaves because of the many layers of depth and, therefore, color**

04 **It's hard to paint over pretty details, but old layers serve to inform our next colors, and how they go together**

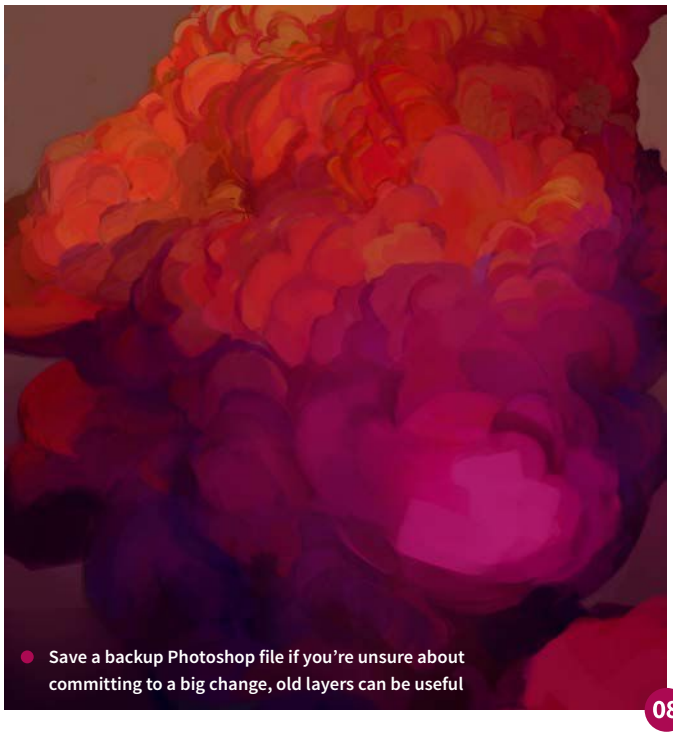
05 **Use bits of shrubbery to inform your cloud shapes; look all around you for references**

06 **Right before extensive rendering begins it's always best to be thorough; make sure you love the color scheme you settle on**



Render clouds in several layers, and keep opacity just low enough see the lines underneath

07



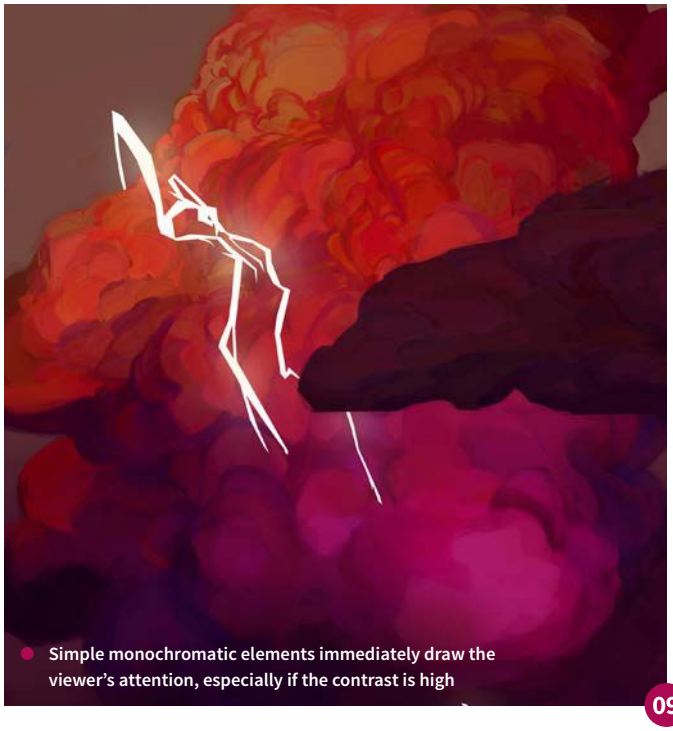
Save a backup Photoshop file if you're unsure about committing to a big change, old layers can be useful

08

07 **Expressive brushwork:** Now we've reached the rendering stage of the painting, you still need to keep it expressive by making quick, precise brushstrokes with the rectangular brush and with another painterly, tapered brush. During this stage unify the forms by going over the lines; you should still be continuously color-picking with the Eyedropper tool, as well as utilizing the Hue/Saturation sliders in the Color panel. I often manipulate both the Foreground and Background boxes to select colors out of the gradient strip. When using so many different hues, it is often best to group similar hues and values together into fields, which can then play off of each other. Similarly, play the busy clouds against the quiet negative space of the background – and so block in the sky with flat colors that, although different, are similar enough in hue and brightness to create a unified element of the larger painting.

08 **Adjusting for mood:** I like the forms in my painting but the mood is a little calmer then I want, but I don't want to resort to a drastic re-painting. If this happens to you a great way to avoid starting again is to go back through the layers and find your first rough composition. I love to re-use layers and discarded drafts of artwork; it would be simple to just duplicate the current layer, but by constantly inviting unplanned shapes and color subtleties, you can often add complexity. Set the new (recycled) layer to Color Burn and drop it down to just 21% Fill, this makes the entire piece darker but doesn't deaden the colors. Now you can use a brush and airbrush on a new layer to smooth the awkward transitions. Try different layer effects with your own recycled artwork – it's a quick way to discover new shapes that are entirely your own.

09 **Addressing composition concerns:** This is a good time to take a step back and look at your painting to spot any problem areas. In my painting I need to reintroduce the lightning, so that it acts as a counterbalance to the curve-heavy clouds, and add more tiers of depth. Start by painting any unnecessary distractions, such as the lower-right corner. Then, using the Lasso tool, copy a section of the cloud on to its own layer; manipulate it using the Transform tools (Edit > Transform > Distort) and a Layer Mask, and finally play with the Hue/Saturation to make it a dark but unobtrusive color. You don't need to finalize the placement of this foreground element until you have decided on the location of the lightning strike. Sketch



Simple monochromatic elements immediately draw the viewer's attention, especially if the contrast is high

09

the lightning on a separate layer and trace it using the Polygonal Lasso tool and augment it with a soft airbrush – all in a bright white.

10 **Depth and final adjustments:** If your clouds, like mine, are still feeling a little flat you can go back in with the painterly brush tools and add more variety of values, hues and saturation to enhance the illusion of a three-dimensional space. You will want to preserve the gestural strokes and shapes, so try to stay as close as possible to the existing forms. When painting clouds of any sort, I find it's best to alternate between soft tools such as the airbrush, and blocky, chisel-like brushes that are more decisive. The combination of both creates a sculpted shape that is soft without being soupy. It is easy to go overboard by dulling and flattening the forms, to overcome carefully use layer masks to go back and forth. Don't rush the final tweaks; they all add important visual interest. ●



The Artist

Stephanie Cost
stephaniedraws.com



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The Artist



J.C. Park
j-circle.net

Software Used:
Photoshop

J.C. Park is an illustrator and concept artist based in Seoul, South Korea. He works on videogames, feature films, and animations. J.C. has worked on games such as *Aion* and *Legend of the Cryptids*.

Paint a mechanical weaponized suit

Concept artist J.C. Park demonstrates how to design and paint a mechanical suit with weapons for a character to wear in a sci-fi battle

Create a wearable and functional mechanical biosuit in Photoshop...

If you are using this tutorial for study, you can expect to increase your ability in designing and drawing sci-fi characters and mechanical body suits. We will imagine a machine that could be wearable and that could increase the power and speed of the person wearing it, and even improve the information they have when using this machine with an eyeglass.

Through this tutorial I will show you some of my working methods for designing rough silhouettes, through to making finished concept art. For example, I will show you how to find good locations for parts of the suit design on a basic body, and thus make the overall silhouette stable.

Each area will have some function, so this will be decided by designing individual parts on the suit. You will also learn the overall drawing processes to use as you draw your image, and as you go further you will learn methods for dividing functional areas with balanced tones, and deciding the positioning of color details.

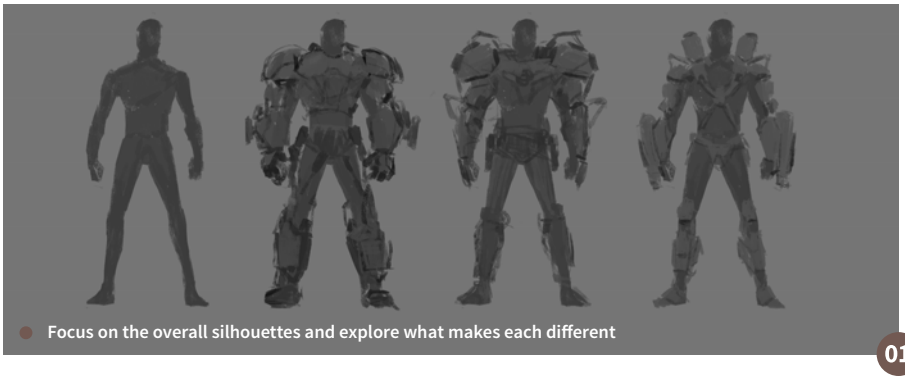
The contents of this tutorial are just my own style, opinion and process so you should only accept the information that you feel is necessary for your own practice.

01 **Create a rough silhouette:** You can start drawing quickly by using the basic Rough brush. There is no need to do full coloring, just use a monotone color because this step is just for you to see the overall shape of the character and machine, to give you a sense of what your final image could look like.

You can draw easy, loose strokes in this step. Do not draw exact lines, structure, or contrast – just use your hand with intuition. Some artists prefer to refine each part; however making a detailed silhouette can be a bit wasteful in this step.

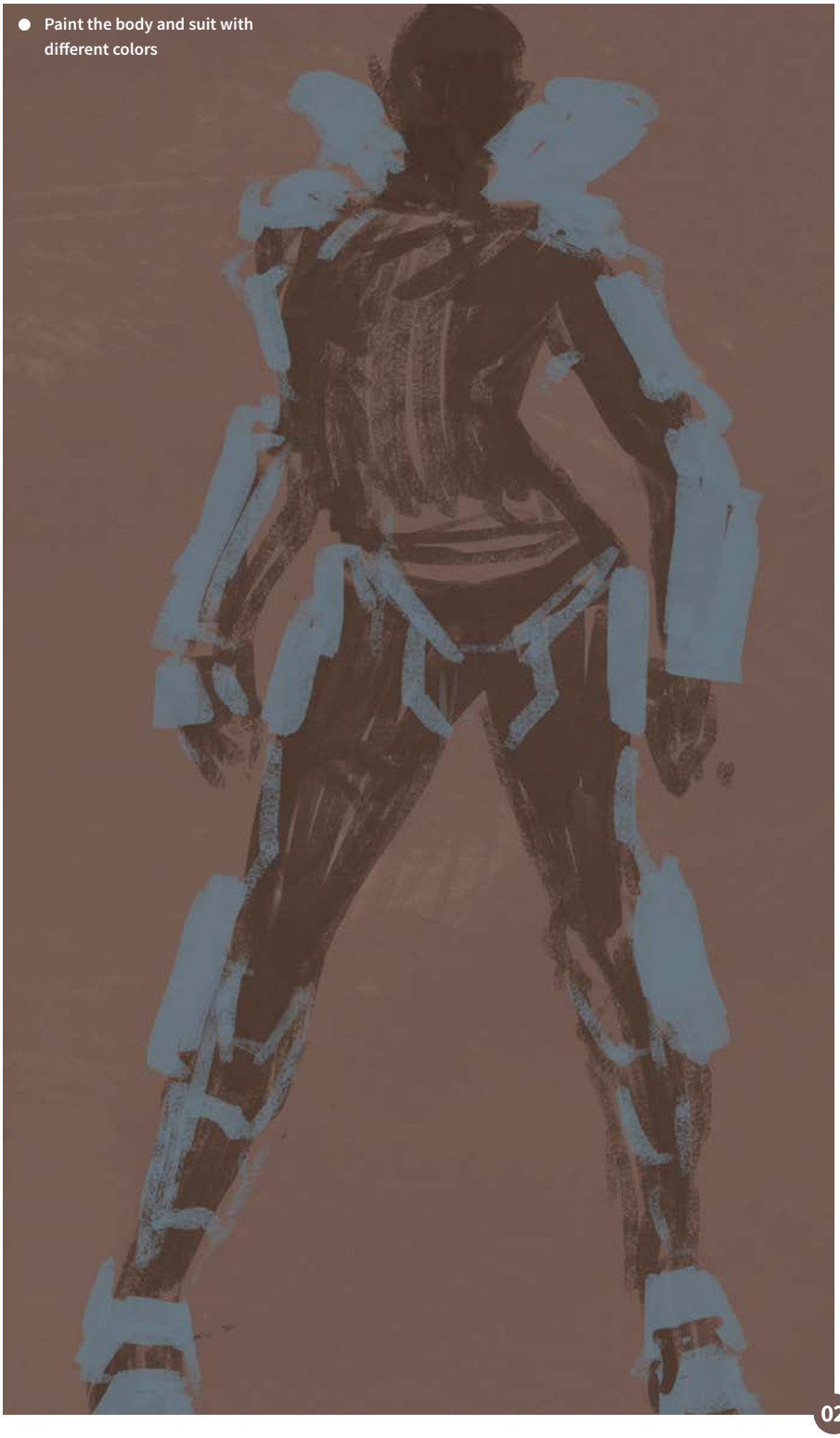
Creating a rougher image is often better. So draw a few basic human bodies and add heavy, basic, and thin equipment options in rough silhouettes.

02 **Changing silhouettes:** Choose one silhouette from the rough concept images you created in the last step. I decide to change the body to a woman because I think that the mechanical suit is very masculine, so if a woman is wearing this suit then the contrast between body and suit will be increased. This is something interesting to combine. ▶



Focus on the overall silhouettes and explore what makes each different

01



Paint the body and suit with different colors

02

"An arm part should have a thick shape because this part is an important element for endurance power"

So, after choosing a woman's body, I over-paint some of the silhouette which will become parts of the suit. You have to think in this step about how your character will move, so locate the joints on the body. Then you should cut each joint of the silhouette and decide some basic colors for each part, ahead of the next step.

This time I decide to use a gray color tone that mixes some blue tones, because blue tones are related to cold, and cold is a good match with a machine suit like this.

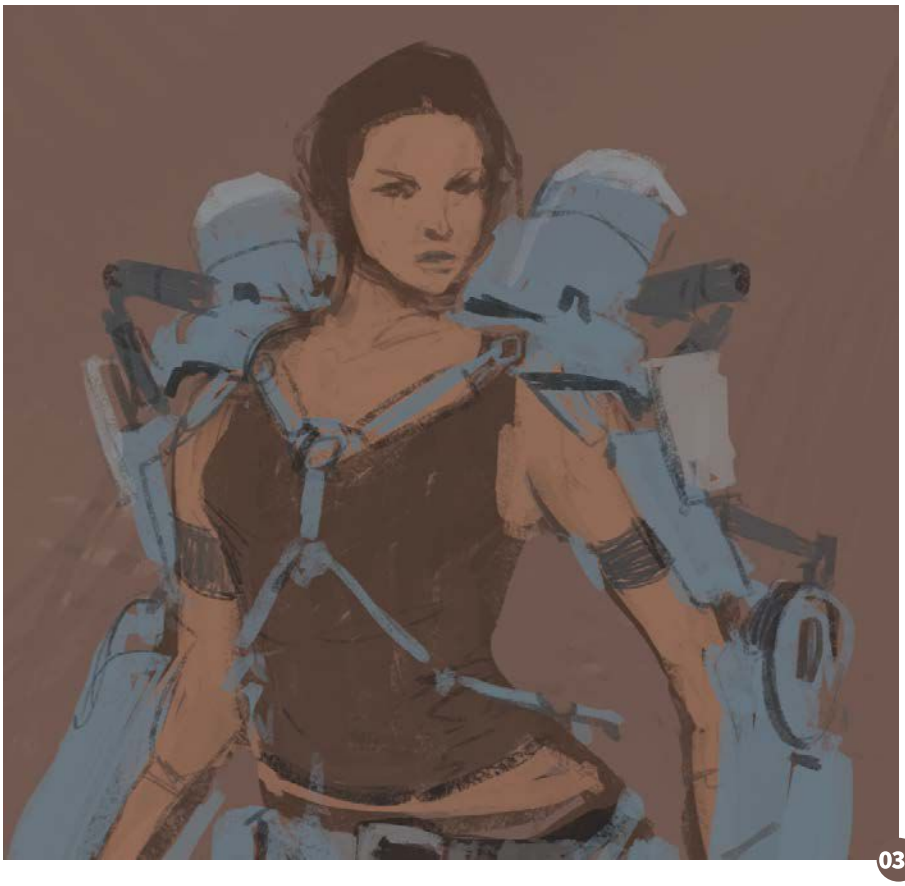
03 **Find the shaded sections:** You have to imagine some detailed design parts of the suit here, so the next step is to indicate the fine shaded sections using a basic rough brush. You can progress through this step very quickly and comfortably because all you are doing is just defining different sections, wear and tear, rivets, and so on.

After this, you will develop ideas to improve the design and overall shape. You could at this point also decide on some facial details, and the basic clothing for the character.

04 **Make the details functional:** To make sure the machine is functional you could imagine the character in movement to see how each joint would move. Then you could add some wires to help improve the movement, and supply some power to each part of the machine from the battery. The location of the battery could have a random designation but I put this on the character's back like in image 04b.

Even if this battery pack is really heavy it could be lifted easily when worn on the back. You can also express some sense of volume on parts of the suit by using the basic Airbrush built into Photoshop. The direction of lighting is going from left to right across this scene, but the lighting direction could be from anywhere, it is just your choice.

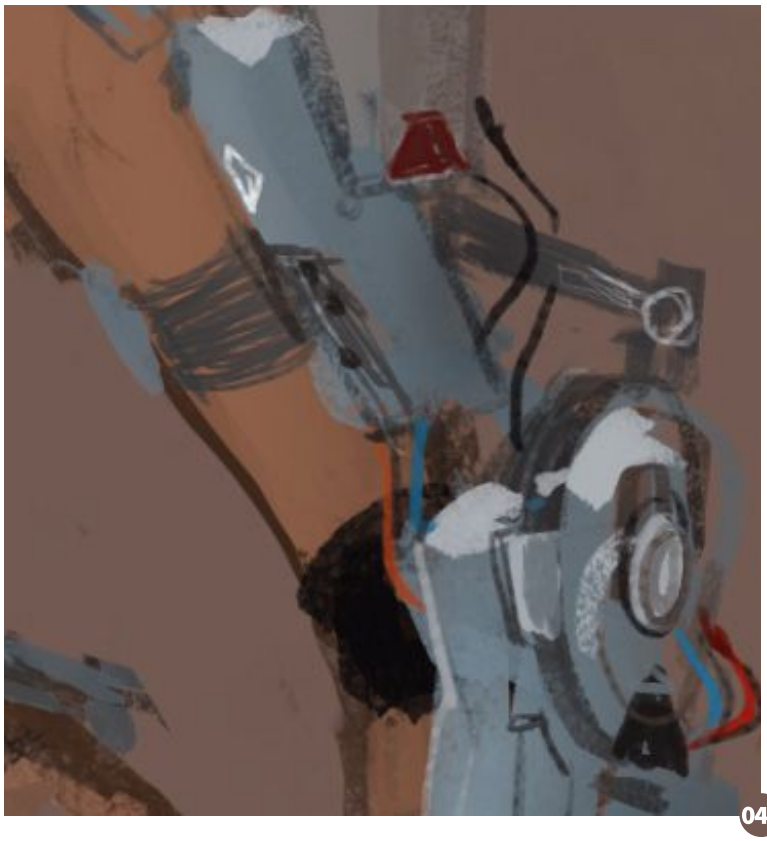
05 **Control thicknesses:** The machine needs to be functional and wearable so you should think about how the mass of the machine will be distributed over the body according to the functionality of each separate part. For example, an arm part should have a thick shape because this part is an important element for endurance power.



03a



03b



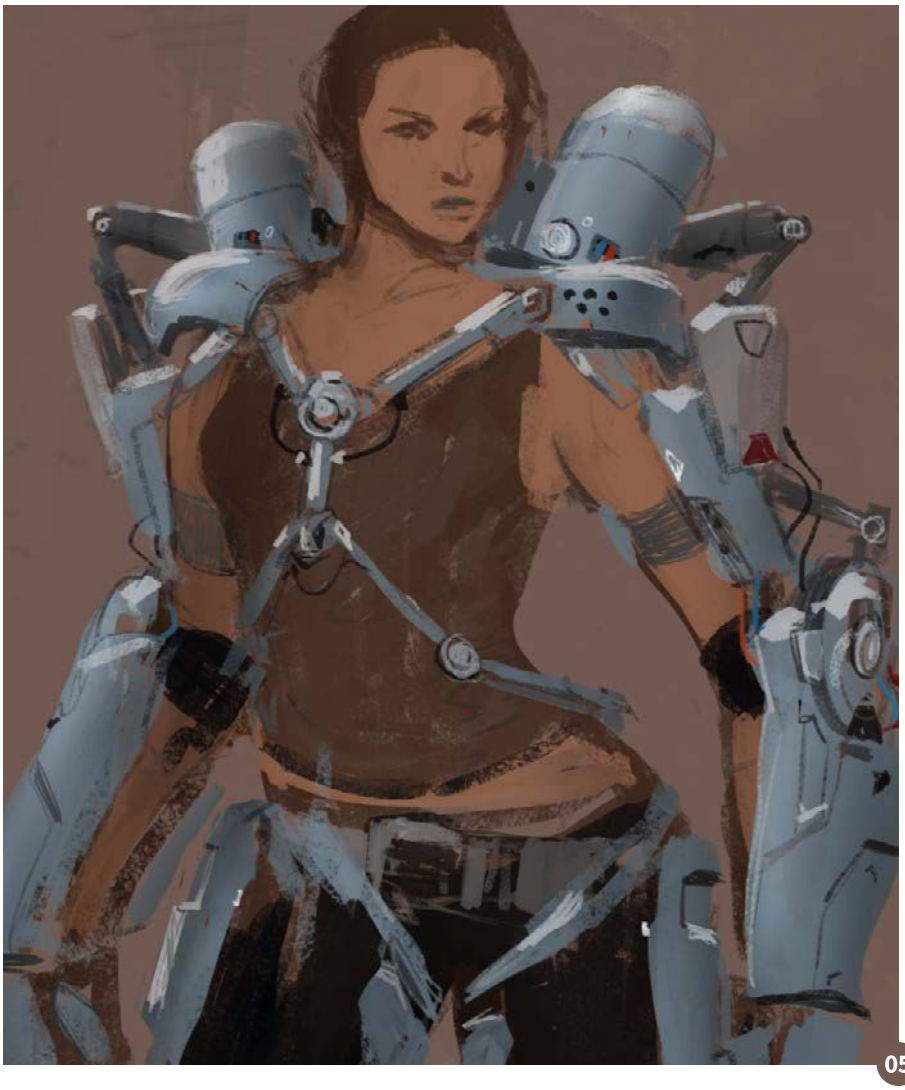
04a



04b

A chest part should be thinner than the arm parts as the function of the chest parts is only to give some support to other suit parts. Also, this will separate out parts and provide the suit with a good overall balance in terms of design.

06 **Add contrasts and detail:** This step is more about the materials of the overall suit, as the parts you have just defined should have a more solid, metallic feel to them. The face is also important and should match the detail of the suit, so describe it vividly by giving the character a strong expression. For example, I draw a heroine that you might expect to come from a superhero movie. ▶



05

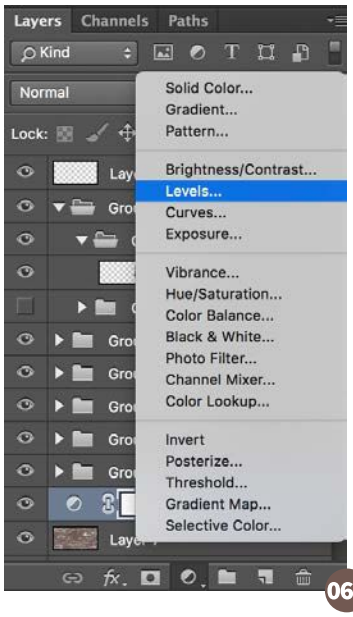
03a With a basic Rough brush decide on a few design details of the character and suit

03b Shade areas that will become details like wear and tear and rivets

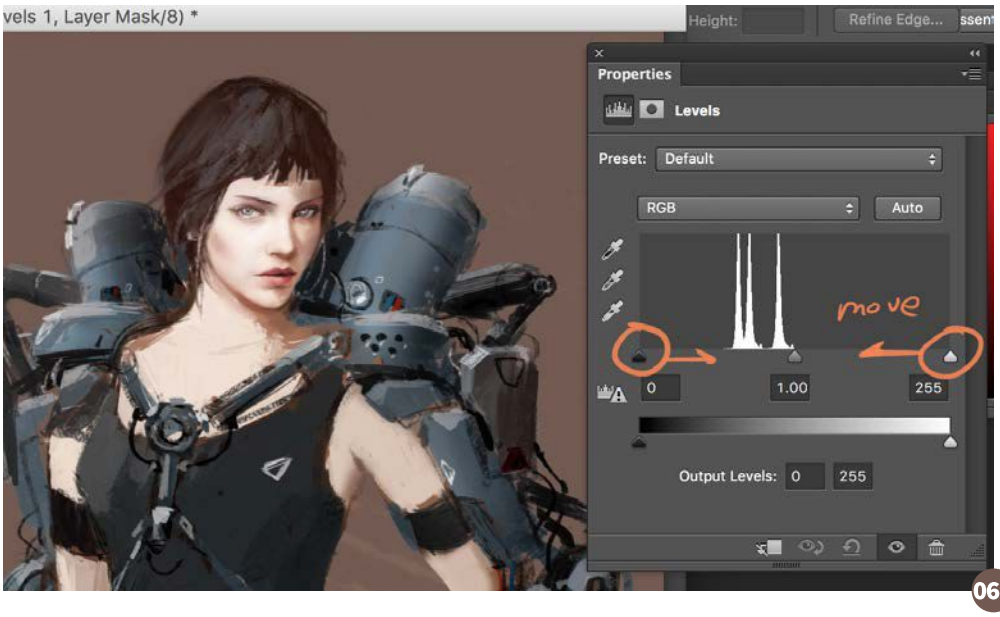
04a Add wiring that connects to the battery pack

04b Locate the battery pack and decide on a lighting direction

05 Think about the overall balance of mass for the suit


Layers
Channels
Paths
Kind
Normal
Lock:
Solid Color...
Gradient...
Pattern...
Brightness/Contrast...
Levels...
Curves...
Exposure...
Vibrance...
Hue/Saturation...
Color Balance...
Black & White...
Photo Filter...
Channel Mixer...
Color Lookup...
Invert
Posterize...
Threshold...
Gradient Map...
Selective Color...

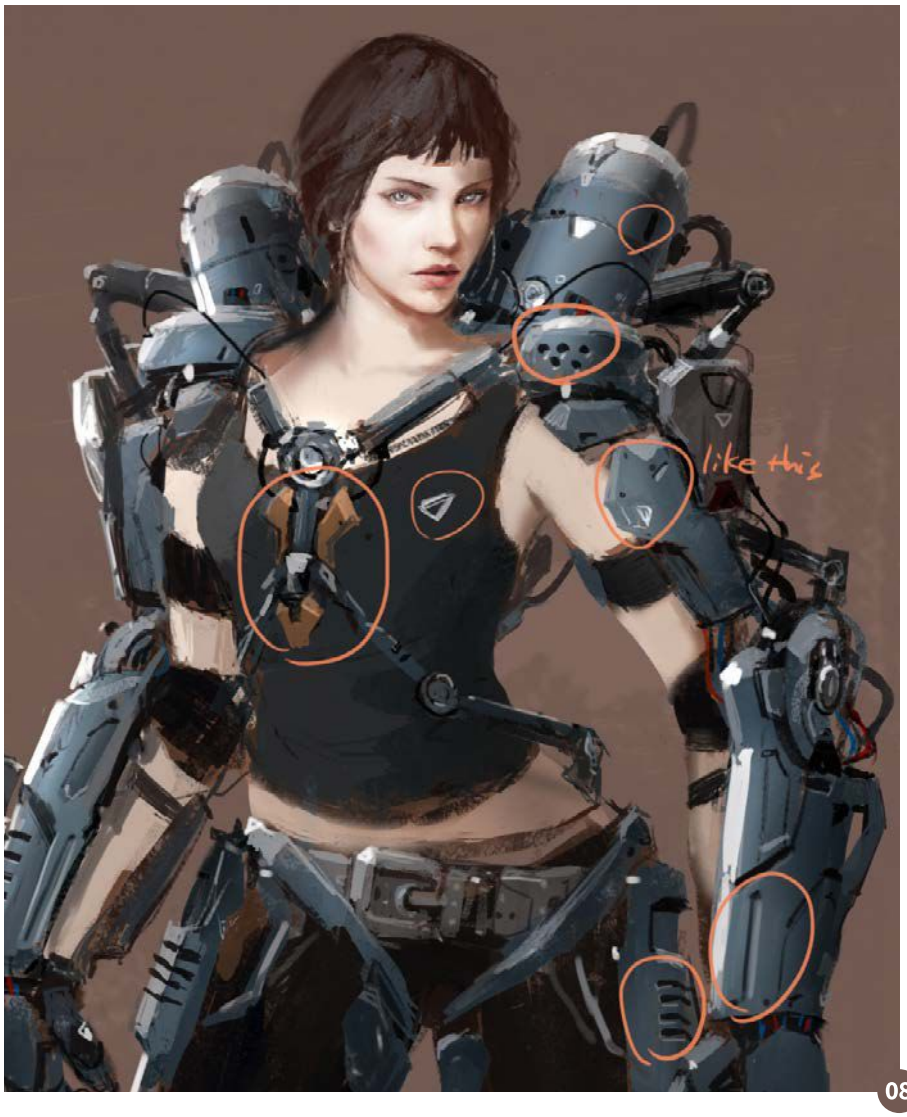
06a


vels 1, Layer Mask/8) *
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Refine Edge...
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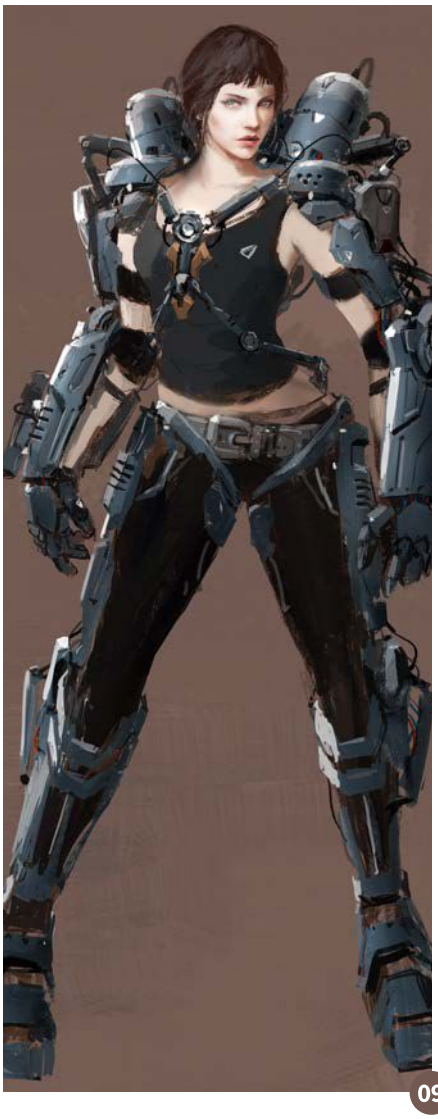
06b



07



08



09

> **"We should now be checking the balance of the whole piece to see, for example, whether the ratio of length between the arms and legs is correct"**

In this step you still have to remember about the direction of your lighting. It should be falling in the same direction as when you previously lit the suit. You could now increase lighting contrast by using a Levels adjustment layer and moving the sliders to control the contrasts.

07 **Metal textures:** Keep adding some more detail to each section to express the texture of the parts of suit that are metal. This could be done by drawing some rim lights.

This looks like an elaborate process but it is an easy way to make areas appear glossier, as you can see in the cross section of parts in image 07.

You could also polish the character's silhouette and the suit using the basic Sharp brush. This brush is very useful when you draw the edges of sections such as the thin parting lines and rivets, or express very thin wires for movement. You will see that your image has a more completed look when this brush is used.

08 **Add more detail:** You could now add various micro elements to parts of the suit, adding small details which help express the depth and wear and tear of the metallic textures. This will help your image approach a more completed look.

You can also see in image 08 that I have added metal parts that have a different color tone, like gold. When you look at the body as a whole it now has a more stable feel because the warm and cool colors are evenly mixed. So just add some small yellow parts to give an impression of more profusion of colors.

09 **Control the body balance:** We should now be checking the balance of the whole piece to see, for example, whether the ratio of length between the arms and legs is correct. You should check the size of the head compared against the whole body and also compare the proportions of metal suit to skin, clothes and so on. If all of these elements are correct then you can consider adding more equipment to the mechanical suit. ▶

06a **Use a Levels adjustment layer to build contrast**

06b **Move the sliders to give some control until a more solid contrast is achieved**

07 **Improve each section with glossy Sharp brushstrokes, adding details**

08 **Add a warm color to balance the colors of the suit and continue adding details**

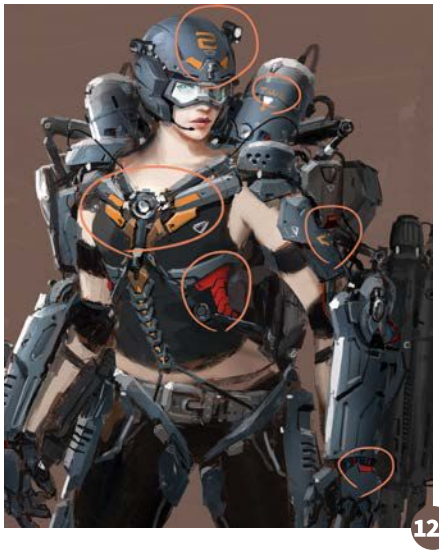
09 **Check the proportions of the figure are correct before adding any more equipment**



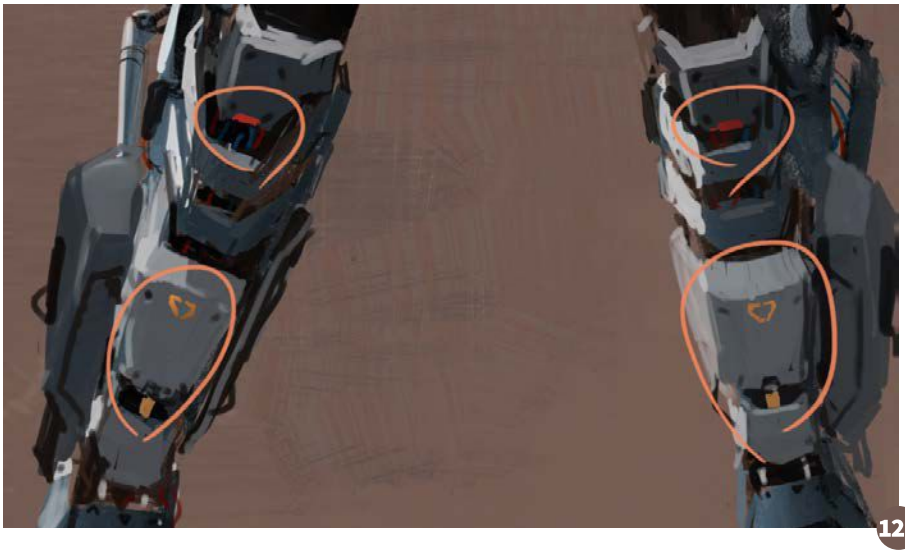
10



11



12a



12b

PRO TIP

The Dodge tool

If you want to put some gloss on metal parts of the suit you could easily use the Dodge tool. Of course, if you try to use this too much the result will not be good.

Ordinarily I adjust the Range setting located at the top bar of the Dodge tool to Highlights. I then cancel the check for the Protect Tones setting beside that because you can see results more surely when using the Dodge tool.

You can see in the image that this tool is very useful when you try to give metal textures to highlights. However, a cautionary point: the overall layers have to be merged or you will just get the influence on that layer.



10 **Additional parts:** In this step, you could make the suit look like full armor as well as a machine to enhance movement. You can do this by adding a helmet and weapons, and also an additional battery to power the weapons.

These additions each need a function; for example the helmet is to protect a soldier's head and it could also function as a walkie-talkie. The goggles on the helmet have a small screen and show information like the weather, the amount of bullets left, or a map of the area the character is exploring to be used in an emergency.

The weapon below the arm could also be used as an emergency, so it should be able to hold lots of bullets in its chamber. Finally, an additional battery is stuck to the legs of the suit in case the back battery is discharged.

11 **Express surface curves:** If you use a rough brush in the first step of a painting (as we did in this tutorial) you can then use the Airbrush in the later steps. This brush is useful when you want to smooth out a rough surface and express a matte texture. You can see in this picture the key areas of this concept where it is important to use the Airbrush.

12 **Add color parts:** The image is almost complete. If you add more warm colors then the overall color tone will be enhanced and balanced. I add a number to the helmet, and warm color details to some areas, and so on, as circled in image 12a. I use orange and red which have a high chroma. The majority of the suit has an almost blue-gray tone, so I also add warm points that match these tones, as you can see in image 12b.

13 **The final image:** The image is now complete! Our character is prepared for battle in a mechanical suit which enhances her movements, has weapons, and gives her information through a high-tech helmet! ●



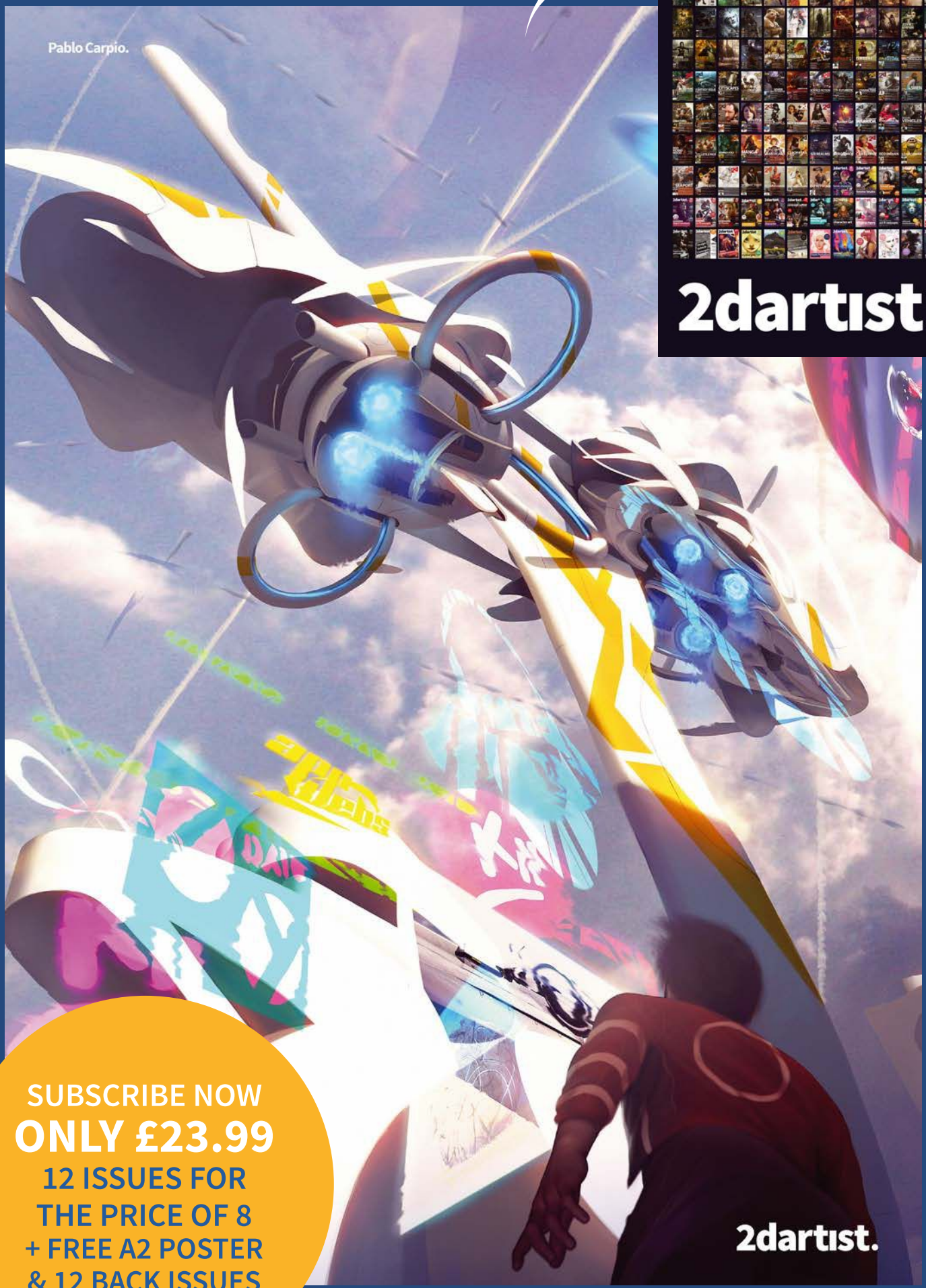
10 **Think about the function of additions you make to the machine**

11 **The Airbrush gives a smooth, matte finish to the helmet, battery and suit arm**

12a **Add warm red and orange tones to harmonize with cool colors**

12b **Small additions of warm tones to cool areas balance the color tones**

A2 POSTER | Image by Pablo Carpio



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The Artist

Daarken
daarken.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Mike 'Daarken' Lim is a freelance illustrator and concept artist working in the game industry. Some of his clients include Gearbox Software, Wizards of the Coast, id Software, Blizzard and more.

Design a costume for an assassin

Master concept artist Daarken demonstrates how to design and paint a costume for a female assassin character

Improve your designs by shooting your own references and using Overlay layers...

In this tutorial I will be going over how to paint a female assassin from imagination. I decided to go with a fantasy assassin over something more contemporary.

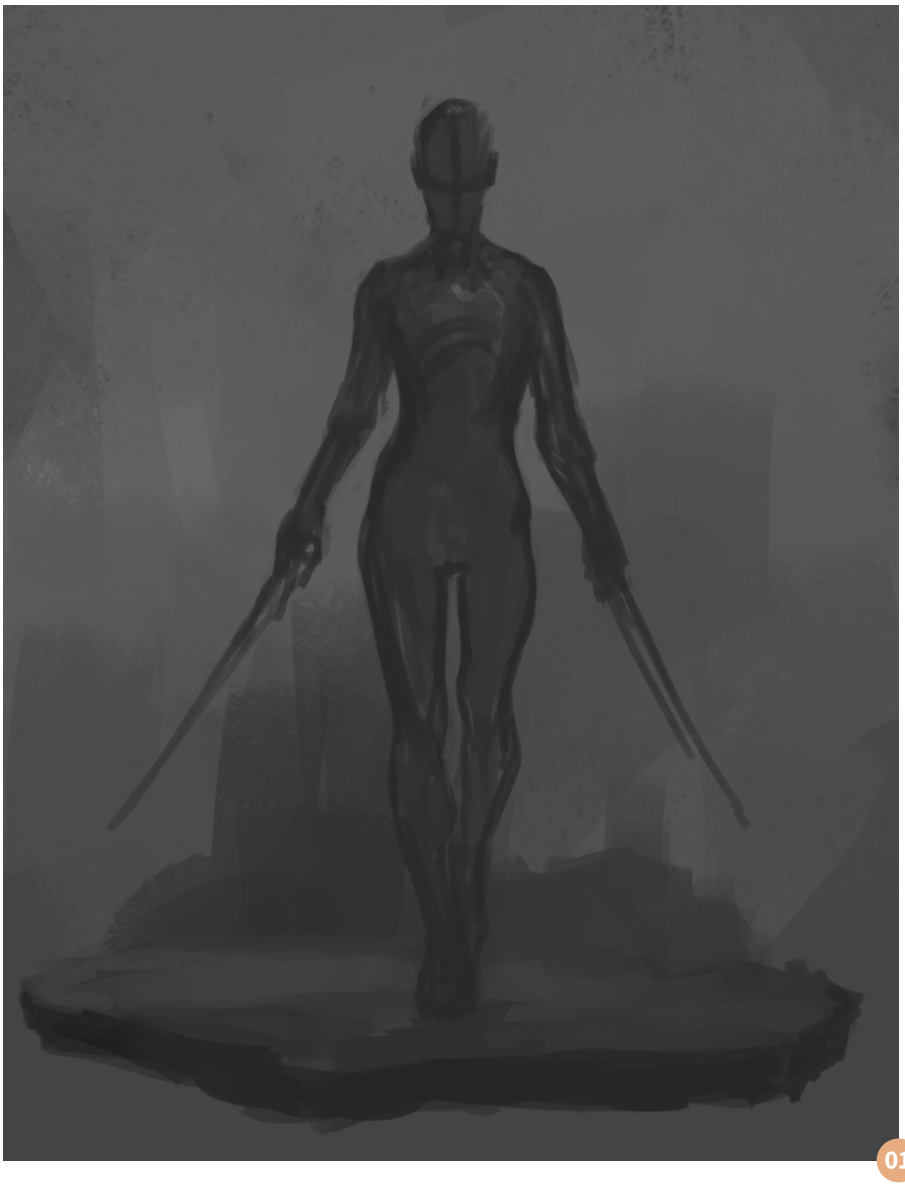
I think most people are pretty familiar with what they think an assassin should look like. While there are certain aspects that viewers expect to see, there is still a lot of freedom when it comes to depicting an assassin.

It's also easy to fall into the trap of depicting a scantily clad female assassin, which I plan on avoiding in this tutorial. My goal is to create something that looks more realistic with functional designs and armor.

I think the controversy over the depiction of females in the gaming industry has been a hot topic for the past couple of years, so it will be a great opportunity for me to go against the current stereotype.

What I think a lot of people don't realize is that many times it isn't the artist's decision to create a scantily clad female, but rather it is the decision of their client. Since this brief is fairly vague, I have the chance to make my own decisions.

My typical painting process is pretty straightforward. I don't rely on too many fancy tricks or effects; most of my painting is done the old fashioned way, painting everything by hand. One technique I use that has sped up my process is using clipping masks to add color. Keeping different elements on separate layers is key when working with clipping masks.



01



02

01 **Pose with attitude:** I want to create a pose that has both personality and attitude. Since she is an assassin, I want to come up with something that a victim might see a few seconds before their death. I also need to make sure I don't cover up too much of her design, so I can't do anything with too much foreshortening or a crouching pose.

She should look tough and the victim should feel fear as she quietly and confidently glides toward them with her weapons drawn. Maybe she could have a slight smirk, pleased with the fact that her victim knows they are about to meet their end.

02 **Designing the costume:** An assassin needs to be silent and blend in with their surroundings. Creating an assassin with a "boob window" or some other device that shows a lot of skin wouldn't make too much sense. Areas of light skin would probably reveal an assassin's location, which they don't want. A cloak that can obscure their face would also probably be a good idea for staying hidden.

I want to avoid using too much metal because metal is noisy. An assassin won't want clanking armor as they try to sneak up behind a target. Cloth and leather armor, while providing less protection, would be better for sneaking around. ▶

01 **Find a pose that has some personality and attitude**

02 **A few quick sketches exploring outfit possibilities**

03 **Refining the pose:** While functionality is important, you also have to remember that you are creating a piece of art here. Creating interesting silhouettes is just as important – if not more so – as creating a functional and realistic character that reads well to the viewer.

Once I have my pose and outfit down, I shoot some references for the hands and arms. You'll

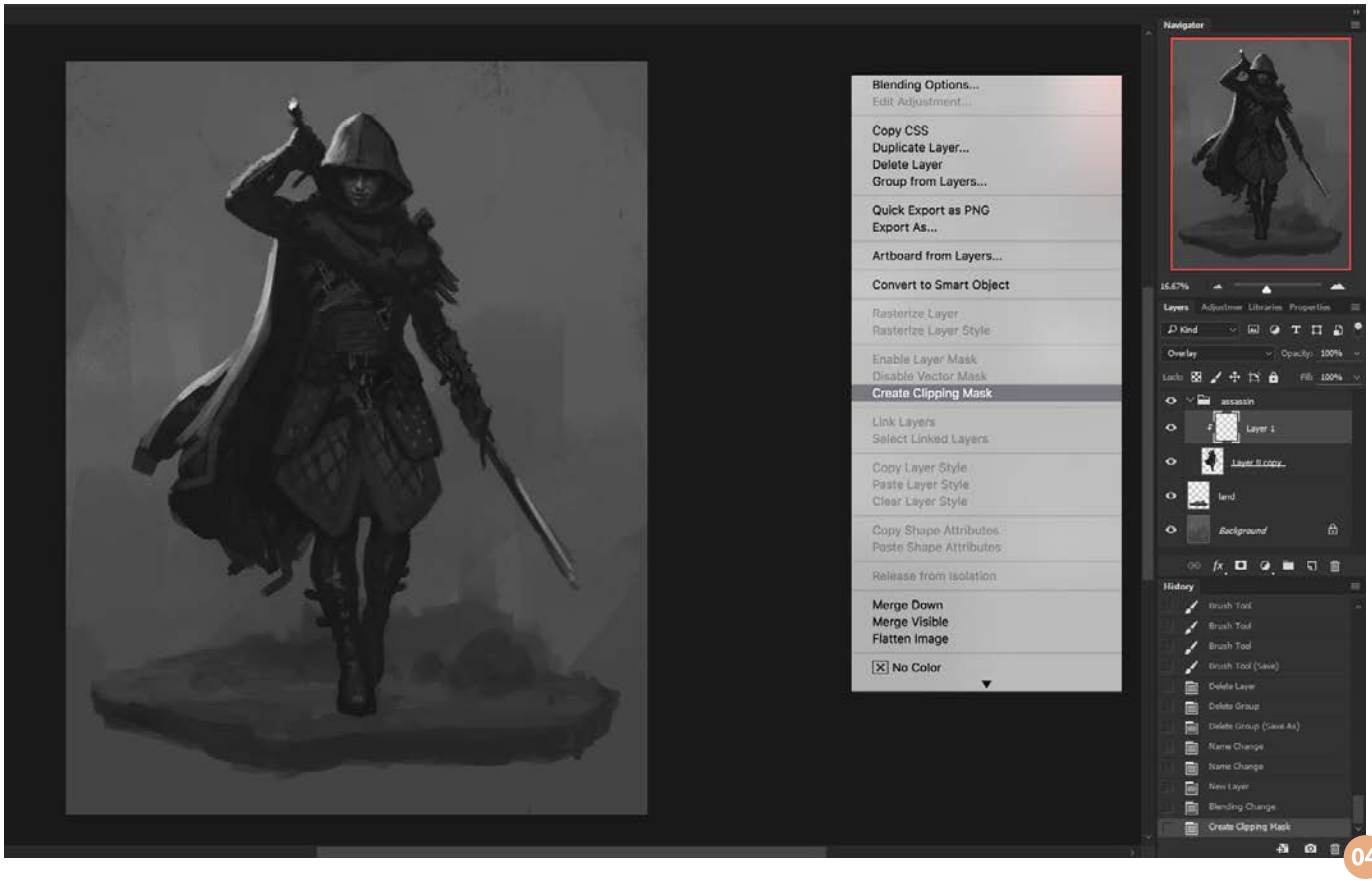
> **"Sometimes I will keep certain elements separate so that I can color them individually, but this time I'm going to color everything at the same time"**

notice that I have to change the angle of her arm because when I was posing, I couldn't make my arm look like my original sketch. Even if you shoot references, it's good to remember that you still have artistic license and you don't necessarily have to completely follow your reference.

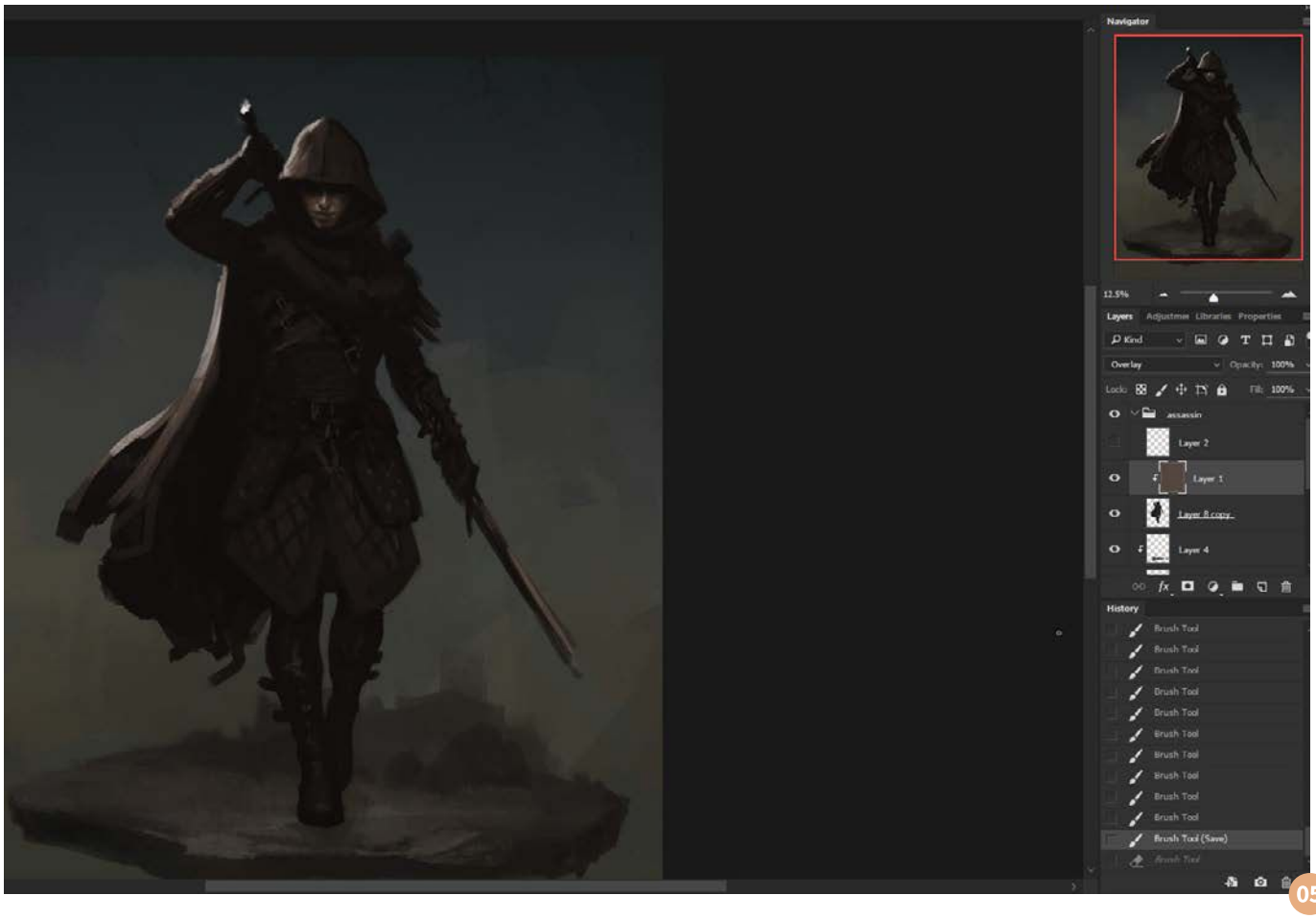
04 **Creating clipping masks:** I've gone ahead and flattened my layers so that the assassin is on a single layer. This will make it easier to color the whole figure with a clipping mask. Sometimes I will keep certain elements



03



04



05

separate so that I can color them individually, but this time I'm going to color everything at the same time.

Create a new layer above your character then right-click on the new layer and select "Create Clipping Mask" from the menu. This will lock the clipping mask to whatever is below it, meaning you can't color outside of the lines.

05 **Adding color:** Sometimes I keep the clipping mask layer as a Normal layer, but since I have a fairly refined sketch, I'm going to set it to Overlay. This will allow me to add color without destroying my black and white painting.

Things can get dark, very fast when working with an Overlay layer, so you might need to pick a color that is lighter than you intend. Remember, we are only adding the base colors. We will still need to refine the colors by hand on a Normal layer. Also, make sure your shadows don't stay too desaturated.

06 **Refining the base colors:** I duplicate the Overlay layer because I want to make some changes, but I want a backup just in case I don't like my changes. I don't want everything to be the same brown color, so I'm starting to introduce other colors into the cloak and outfit.



06

Maybe the inside of the cloak could have a bolder color to make it stand out a little more.

You can see that all of my shadows are still really muddy and desaturated. I'll fix those as I refine my painting.

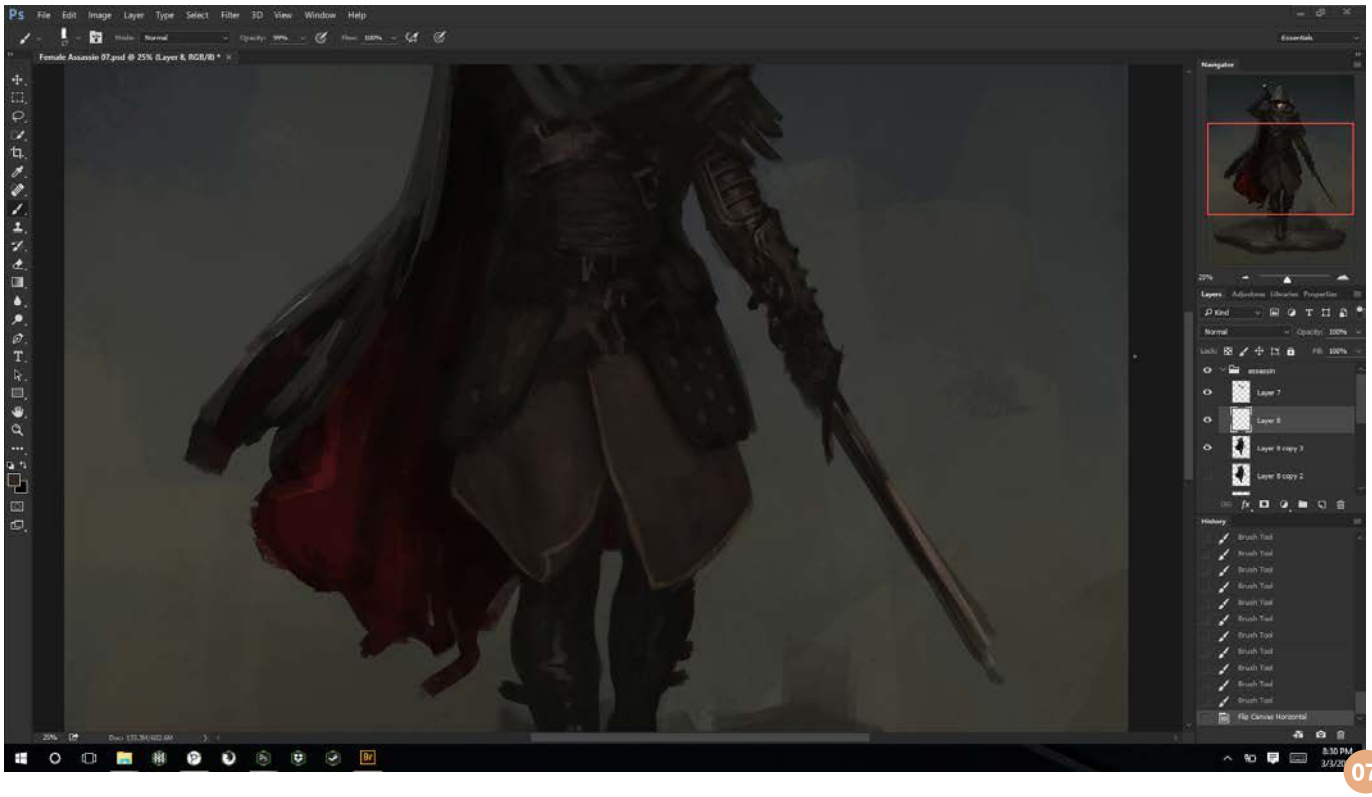
07 **Creating materials and textures:** I'm at the point where I can start thinking about and painting the different materials and textures of the outfit. I want a few pieces of metal ▶

03 **Refine the pose after shooting some references for the arms**

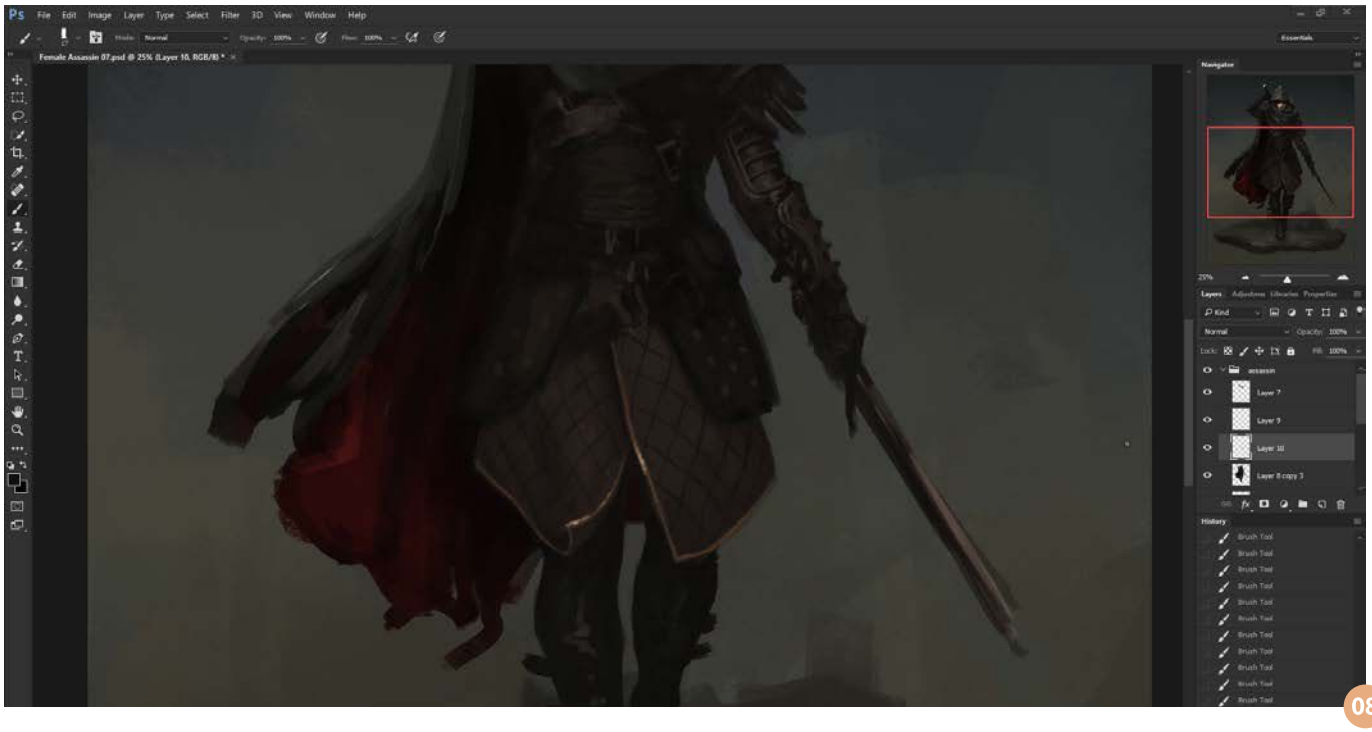
04 **Create a clipping mask in preparation for painting color**

05 **Add the base colors with an Overlay layer**

06 **Continue to refine the base colors with an Overlay layer**



07



08

in the design just to give it a little interest and variety. I'm thinking I could add metal studs to the tassets and bracers.

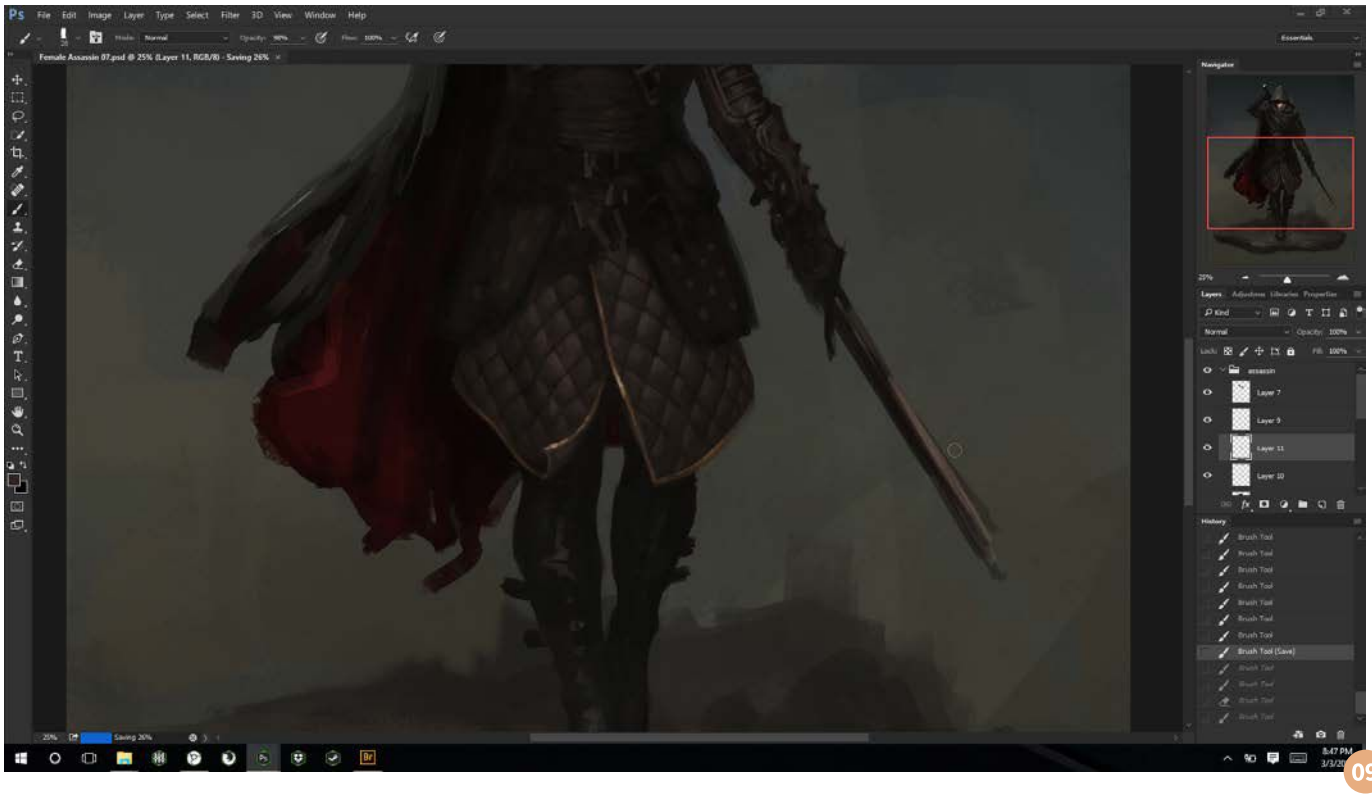
I want her coat to be made of quilted armor, so I paint the basic shape first, keeping in mind her legs underneath the coat. Little details like turning up the corners of a coat or cloak can give a sense of movement.

08 **Refining the armor:** Now that I have the basic shape of the coat blocked in, I can create a new layer and paint the lines of the quilted armor. Make sure the lines of the quilting follow the contour of the coat, otherwise everything will look flat. This also applies to shadows. Shadows should always follow the contours of whatever object they fall on.

I also decide to add a gold trim to the coat for some color variety and to make things pop a little more. Look for ways to add interest to your designs. They could be things like buttons, trim, or buckles.

09 **Finishing the armor:** The final step of painting the armor is to render each individual quilted section of the armor. Usually I'll start painting these underneath the line layer. Once those basic shapes and values have been established, I'll create a new layer on top of the line layer and continue refining. All each shape really needs is a highlighted section and a shadow section to show the forms.

I keep the lighter values in the middle of the figure. As the armor wraps around the figure,



09

the values should get darker in order to make it look like it has more form. Once you put them all together, you get a nice quilted armor look.

10 **Refining the face:** When I added the base colors to the face, the colors were really muddy and desaturated. Now I can create a new layer and start fixing the colors on a Normal layer. I need to saturate the shadows and block in the planes of the face.

Right now the face is pretty rough and it's easy to get discouraged when the face doesn't look as good as you would like. You have to be confident that it will look better in the end, which is easier said than done.

11 **Adjusting the colors of the face:** I'm beginning to add some warmer colors to the face. Before the colors were getting a little too yellow and green, which has given it that muddy look. I don't want to make everything warm though, I still want some areas that are cooler and ▶



10

07 **Paint materials and textures on the outfit**

08 **Add the lines of the quilted armor on a separate layer**

09 **Render the quilted armor paying attention to highlights and shadow**

10 **Start to refine the face by painting opaquely on a Normal layer**

some areas that are warmer. The area where the light meets the shadow is also a good place to add a more saturated warm color.

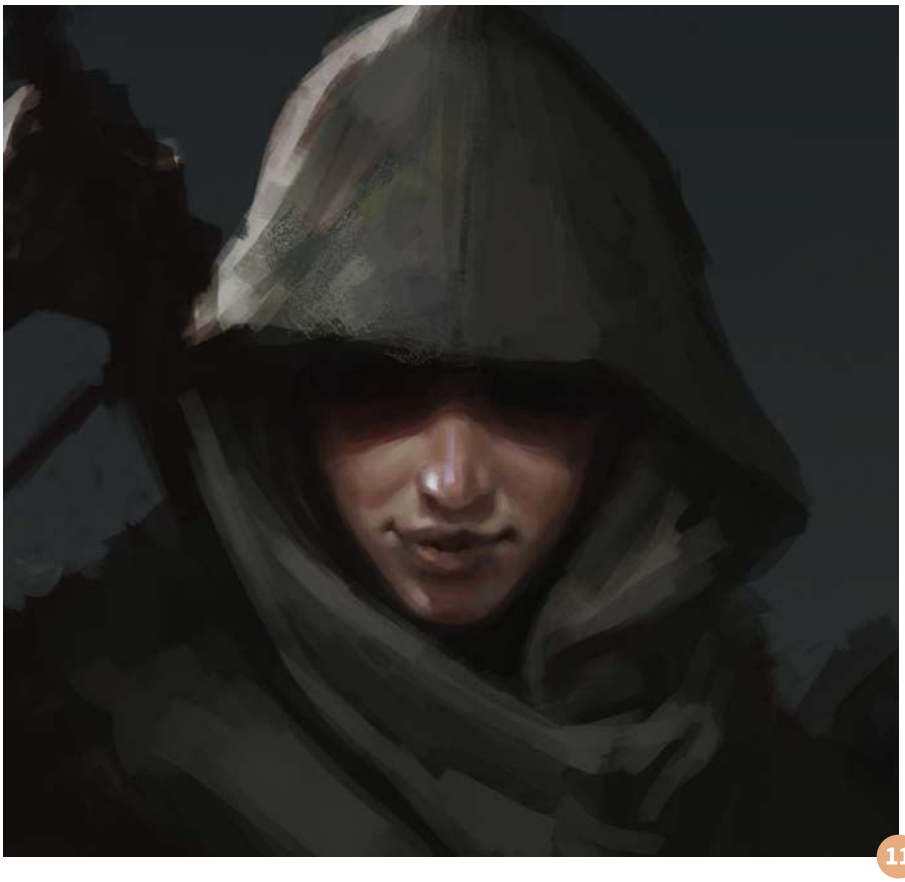
Edge control of your brush is also important when painting a face. You don't want too many hard edges when painting around the mouth, otherwise it might look flat.

12 **Finishing the face:** This is the final stage of painting the face. I'm continuing to work on my color variation and refining more of the features. I also add some more color to her lips and a cool fill light to offset the warm colors in her face.

Having the strong rim light on the left doesn't work as well because of all the shadows around her bent arm. However, moving it to the right side and making it cooler and darker helps avoid that situation. Again, since her outfit is warm, the cooler light helps add color variation and interest.

13 **Painting from reference:** When you are painting a pose that you aren't very familiar with, it's a good idea to shoot some references. You don't need a fancy camera or a studio lighting setup. Most of my pictures are taken with my phone in the bathroom.

Having a sword handy is extremely valuable as an artist. It helps me get the perspective right on the hilt and you can really get a sense of how you would hold a sword. You can see which poses work and which ones don't.



11



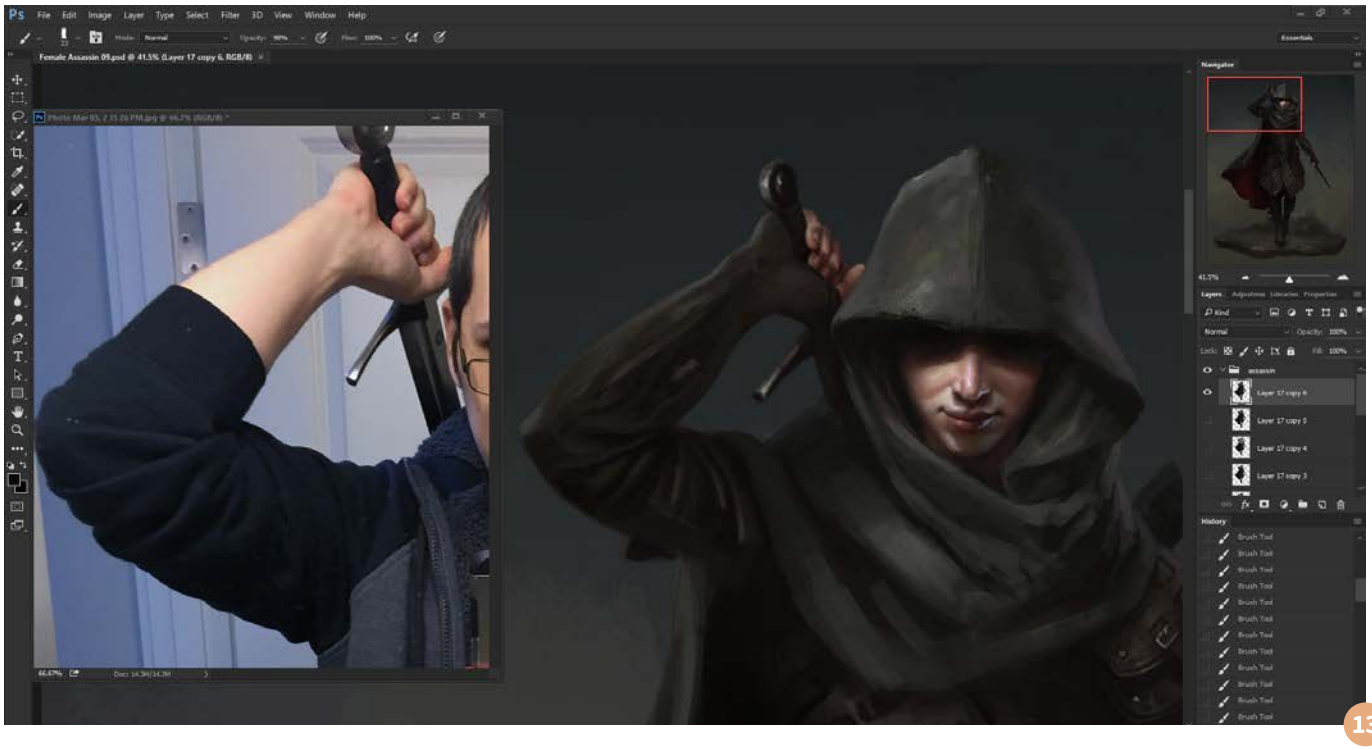
12

PRO TIP

Layers!

People always ask me how many layers I use. I know some artists take great pride in only using one layer for their whole painting. That is great for them, but that process might not work for everyone.

Using more than one layer isn't bad, it isn't cheating, and it doesn't mean you are a lesser artist. When someone sees your final painting in a book or on a card, they aren't going to know or care how many layers you used to create that painting. They are going to see that it is either a good painting or a bad painting and nothing else.



13

14 **Adding more details:** The painting's almost finished, so now I'm just adding details and refining elements. Originally I was going to give her long swords, but I have decided that it makes more sense if she has daggers.

The problem with swords is that they take more room to wield, plus you have to worry about the scabbard hitting objects as you're sneaking around (which is why I put them on her back). Daggers make more sense for stealth.

15 **The final touches:** I wasn't originally going to add quilted armor to her torso, but I feel the repeating elements unify the design. It also gives me an opportunity to add more gold trim to the top part of the design.

I add metal studs to her tassets and to her bracers, again, repeating elements. Repeating shapes are a good way to unify a design, but don't go overboard! Finally, I remove the right scabbard from her back to streamline the silhouette, as I'm not sure people would recognize the shape.



14

11 **Refine the face and adjust the colors avoiding hard edges around the mouth**

12 **Add the final touches to the face and determine an appropriate lighting**

13 **Paint the arm from references you have shot yourself if possible**

14 **Add details to the armor and weapons thinking about their function**



The Artist

Daarken
daarken.com



3DTOTAL**PUBLISHING**

"These tutorials not only provide interesting exercises for the beginner to help build a strong foundation for drawing and painting, but also provide important insights into the mindset of a concept artist. Very useful and inspiring!"

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beginner's guide to digital painting in Photoshop®:

characters

Following on from the highly successful *Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop*, this latest title explores the popular techniques used in character design.

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting: Characters is a comprehensive guide for artists wishing to create convincing and detailed characters. It features established artists such as Charlie Bowater (concept artist at Atomhawk) and Derek Stenning (freelance concept artist and illustrator, with clients including Marvel Entertainment and Nintendo) who share their industry experiences by covering such aspects as posing characters, choosing the correct costumes, conveying emotions, and creating suitable moods. Comprehensive step-by-step instructions – plus a quick tips section demonstrating how to paint elements that are integral to character design and a glossary covering essential Photoshop tools – make this an invaluable resource for those looking to learn new skills, as well as those pursuing the next level.

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Brushes



Create an overgrown alien city

Discover how Arthur Haas creates his organic alien landscapes using custom brushes and pixel displacement techniques



The Artist

Arthur Haas
ahaas.nl

Software Used:
Photoshop

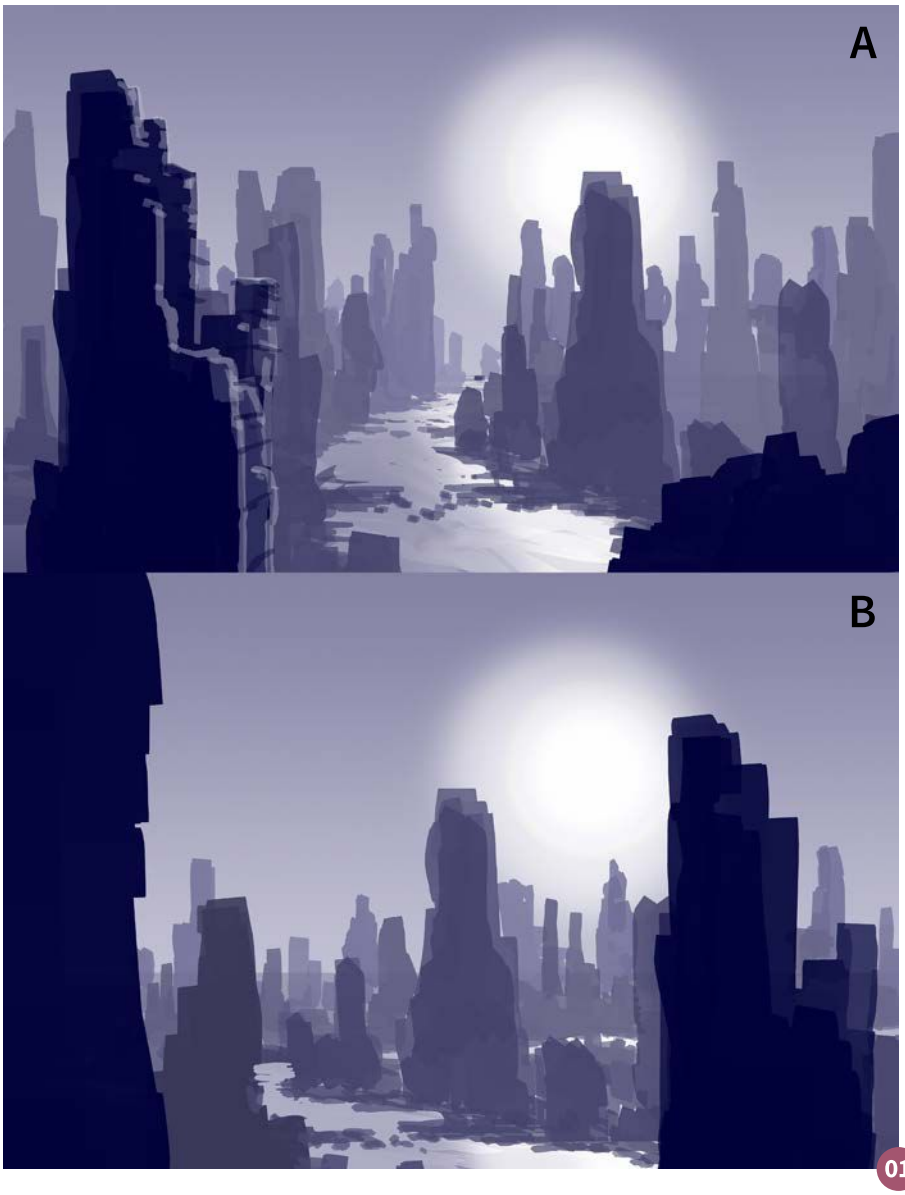
Arthur Haas is a freelance concept artist and illustrator from the Netherlands. He has a passion for science fiction, and creates artworks influenced by the genre for films, books and magazines.

Paint a world overgrown with alien vegetation...

The brief I got for this image was to create an alien city in ruins, overgrown by vegetation. In this tutorial I will take you through all the steps I take when making an image. I will explain all my considerations in regard to the brief, such as composition, the color and mood, lighting and design, from first sketches to final image. I will also explain the tools I use and how I use them. I use Adobe Photoshop CC on a Wacom Cintiq with an art pen to create this image.

As you will find out I like to leave a lot of the actual design up to chance. I do this by using custom brush shapes that have a built-in randomness so I never know exactly what shapes will appear on my screen and how I will use them. This is a way for me to keep things spontaneous and alive. I use these custom brush shapes not only for the Brush tool but also for the Smudge tool, the Mixer Brush tool and even for the Eraser. By the end I hope you will have picked up some useful tips and tricks and be inspired to use them in your own unique way and make awesome art with it.

While I am enclosing some of the brushes I have used for this image I do encourage you, not only to play with them but also to make your own variations with them. I assure you that this will be much more satisfying and fun.

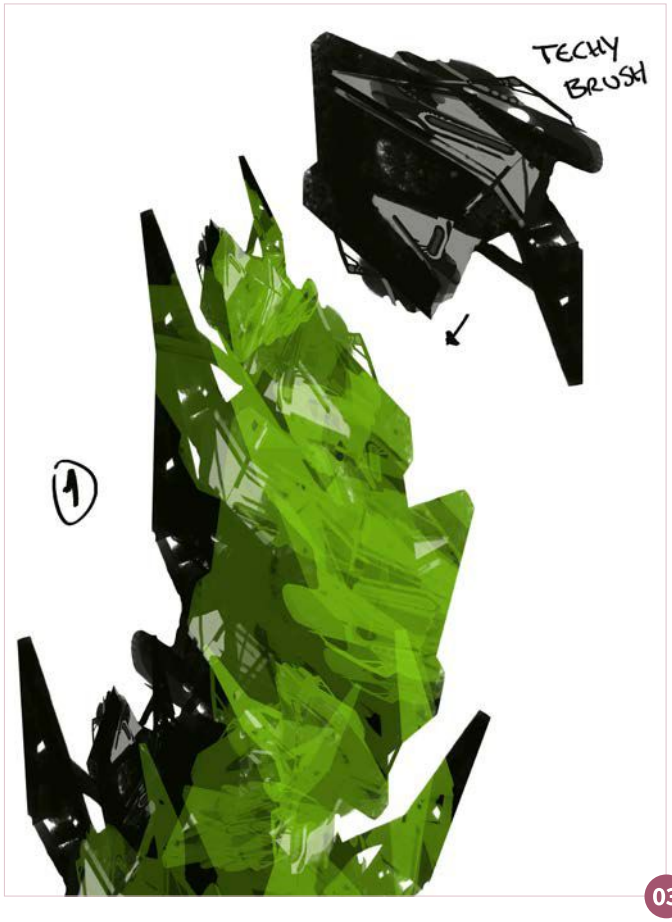


01

01 Initial sketches: When I first get a brief I like to take some time to let an image



02



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form in my mind. With this one I saw a cityscape with a river running through it. Adding water is a good way of giving life to an image and leading the eye of the viewer through the landscape. The sketching step is perhaps the most important one of the whole process so I make sure I am satisfied with it before moving any further.

In this case I make two sketches (A and B) and eventually choose the first one (A). This is just a basic layout at the moment with no design or even color, as the most important thing right now is just the placement of elements and the basic light direction.

02 **Color sketching:** Adding color is usually my next step. It becomes more difficult to add color later to a fairly detailed image, which most probably will have many layers already. Color also changes the atmosphere of the picture so I want to get that to my liking early on.

I paint a rough placement of plant and trees in the foreground with vibrant, eye-catching colors. These will suggest to the viewer what the jungle city further in the distance of the image looks like.

If I'm totally honest it takes some holding back to not immediately dive into details early on in the process, but enough suffering will teach you that it is better to wait!

03 **Alien building designs:** The foreground in this image will show what the rest of the landscape, far out of view, might look like, so it has to lure you in. I want to show what the alien architecture looks like up-close. For the sake of this tutorial I'll show you the steps of designing the alien buildings separate from creating the rest of the landscape.

In the first stage I throw down a few strokes with the Techy brush I have created for this purpose in black, using 100% Opacity and Flow. Then, when I'm happy with the result I select "Lock transparent pixels" (the checkerboard symbol at the top of the Layer panel or "/"). You may want to set up a custom shortcut for this setting to avoid unnecessary clicking, by going to Edit > Keyboard Shortcuts. Then I add a few strokes with that same brush using a bright green hue and less opacity on top of the black strokes.

04 **Displacing pixels:** Once I'm satisfied with the general shape of the building, I switch to the Smudge tool (a smearing finger icon on the Tools panel). I love this tool for the multiple uses it offers. In this case I'm going to use the Smudge tool as a displacement tool, meaning you can shift pixels without smearing them but instead shoving them into a different position. I do this by setting the strength at 100% (if you're using Photoshop up until version CS5), or at 99% if you're using a more recent version (which is sadly not as much of a blur-free displacement but close enough mostly).

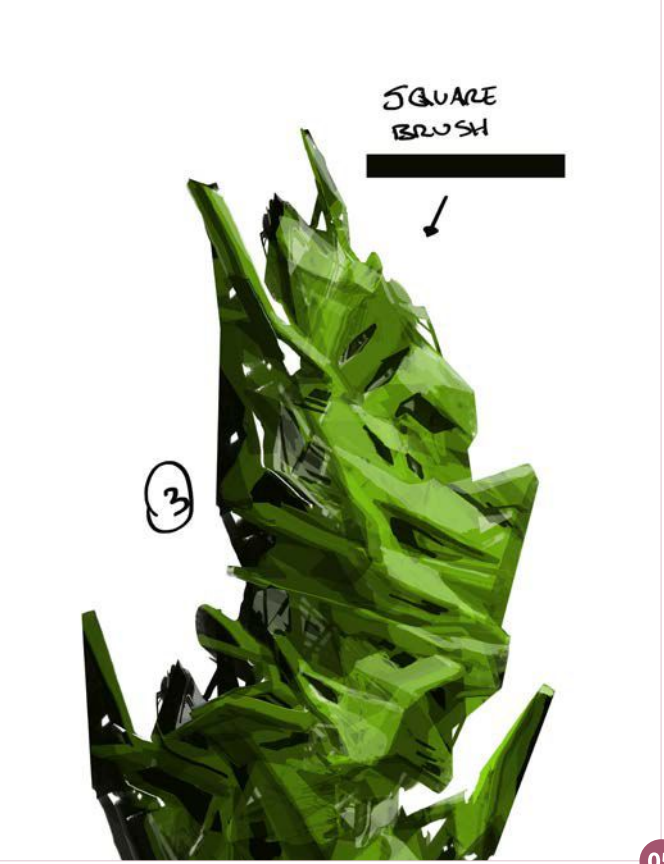
Now I just... well, I just play, shoving shapes here and there. I use a rectangular shape and I can turn it exactly how I want to with my Wacom art pen. If you have a regular stylus you can set the angle to Pen Tilt (Brush panel > Shape Dynamics > Angle Jitter Control) instead of rotation. The downloadable brushes for this tutorial all have the angle set to Pen Tilt since most digital artists don't use an art pen which has Rotation Control. It takes some getting used to before you get the angle going the way you want but it does add a happy accident factor. ▶

01 **Sketching in black and white or monochrome allows you to focus on composition**

02 **Add loose blocks of color without details to indicate a jungle atmosphere in the scene**

03 **With the Techy brush paint black strokes, lock the pixels then add green strokes with a lower opacity**

04 **Use the Smudge tool to displace pixels**



05



06

Since Photoshop CC you can finally see the angle of your cursor before you put down your stroke. For me this, in combination with the Rotation Control of the art pen, finally feels what painting digitally should feel like.

05 **Repurposing tools:** The same rectangular brush shape from the previous step can also be used to paint or erase. First, just select the tool you want to use, and then select the brush preset you like. This doesn't work for all tools but for quite a few.

If you want to save a tool to use again and again you can do that by going to your Tool Presets panel, click on the drop-down list, select New Tool Preset, and then give it a name and enter. In this case I use that shape to paint. I add a layer and start by painting the shadows with 40% Opacity in black, and then the light areas with a 40% Opacity white color.

06 **The Cracks brush:** Because I am getting kind of excited in designing this shape, I just remember that it's supposed to be a ruin! So I start pushing and pulling the shape with that same Smudge tool from step 04 at 99% Strength, erasing some bits here and there, and painting some holes in too.

Then I apply the Cracks brush, just throwing it on there with "Lock transparent pixels" selected so it



07

stays within that shape. Next I use the Dodge tool (a Popsicle shaped symbol under the Smudge tool on the Tools panel) to add some light edges on to those cracks. I realize that a portion of this shape will be invisible under the plants and trees that will come on top of it. Ah well...

07 **Playing with shapes:** I have noticed that I have a tendency to leave this stage out of tutorials but actually it's an integral part of creating an image: looking for shapes, seeing what works and what doesn't. Here I'm obviously searching for shapes but it might be more accurate to call it playing.

I kind of like the pink/yellow plant but my mind says it is too far away from the original color sketch. So I make some shapes on the side that come closer to that sketch in terms of color. However, I decide eventually that it is better to drop it.

08 **Organic form brushes:** As I often do I make a new brush on the spot before I go on. I do this in a new image file of 1000 × 1000 pixels. I paint a funny type of plant which I hope will look good applied as a brush. Having a love for alien forms, I keep adding brushes to my library. Then I can make brushes with other organic looking brushes, lifting the brush-making to a whole new level: a fun level.



08

The more brushes you create, the more you get a feel for which shapes work as a brush, and which ones do not. It can be a bit of a trial and error thing but I'm quite happy with how this one is turning out.

09 **Color and glow:** Now I focus on building up the colors in the scene. I have to apply the magenta color manually since color information cannot be included in brush shapes. I continue to work with the purple flower shapes too because they look so alien.

I add a bit of a glow to the flowers with my Glow brush. This is the ordinary Soft Round brush with ▶

05 **Use a rectangular brush shape again, this time to paint**

06 **Use the downloadable Cracks brush and the Dodge tool to paint a ruin effect**

07 **Play around with shapes to see what works and don't be afraid to scrap shapes**

08 **Create brushes from organic forms to quickly paint alien plants**

09 **Use the Soft Round brush to paint a glow in an unsaturated color on the flowers**



09

50% Opacity and 10% Flow. The main difference here is that the mode is set to Linear Dodge. It's best to use a color which is not too saturated to paint a glow with.

10 **Middle-ground buildings:** In the same way I painted the foreground buildings, I will now make the main buildings in the middle-ground as this is where your eye goes to next. This time however, I use a mid-tone green instead of black for the shadows and a more blue-ish green, a shade lighter, on top of that.

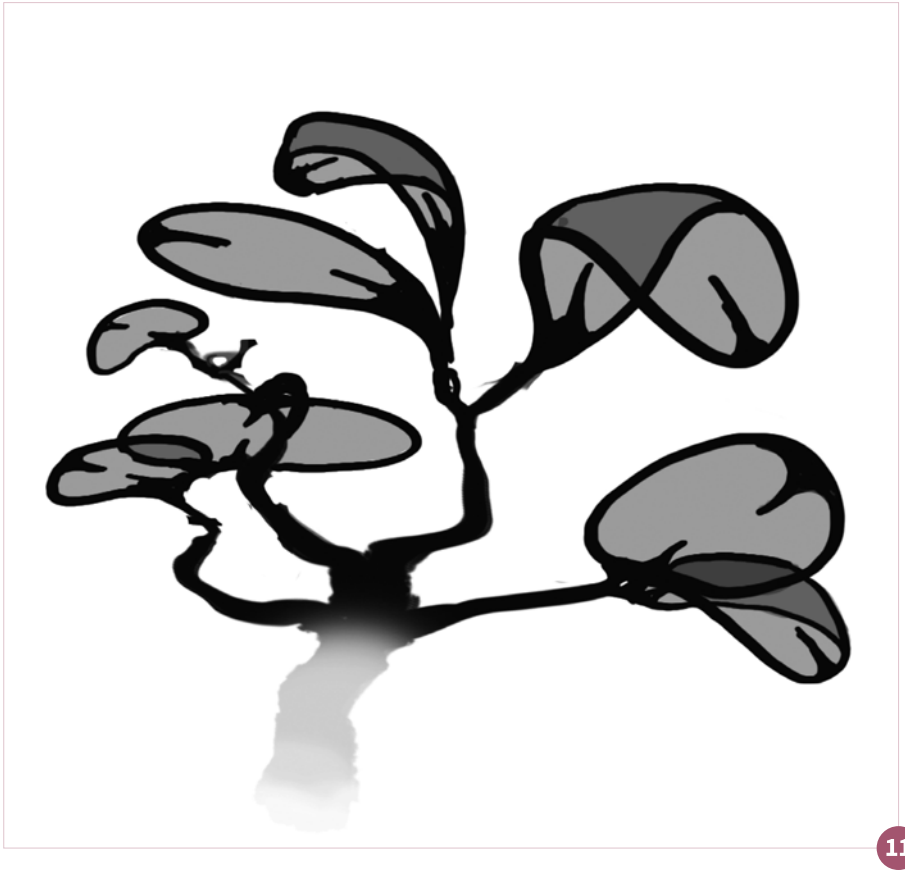
I change the course of the river so that it is more like sketch B from step 01. I notice that it's quite a challenge to not get lost in the alien design and forget that these are all the ruins of a city. Again, I forget for a moment that the bottom and other parts of the building are going to be invisible underneath a jungle. Being carried away is part of my process I guess. However, I do remember to add cracks here.

11 **Middle-ground plants:** The next step is to let the buildings become overgrown. I start by using the Funny Plant brush I made earlier, but somehow for those more distant buildings it doesn't seem to work. I need something leafier that reads more like trees or a canopy from afar.

I make a more leafy brush the same way as I did the Funny Plant brush by drawing organic shapes. I make sure to have some transparency in the leaves to prevent the jungle from becoming too solid and unnatural looking. The more areas of light gray tone there are in a brush, the more transparent it turns out.



10



11

PRO TIP

Sketches

When you start with a good sketch you almost can't go wrong. Start with a bad one or a so-so one and you'll spend a lot of time afterwards trying to fix the image while you get sidetracked by details you've already added.

When you look through your eyelashes or minimize your sketch to a thumbnail size and it looks good, it's good. Another pitfall can be making too many sketches as it will get increasingly difficult to choose the right one.

12 **Coloring a canopy:** The new Canopy brush works much better than the Funny Plant brush in the middle-ground. I apply it liberally on the nearest building and the parts across the river which I keep on the same layer.

At first I keep the plants a slightly darker shade of green from the building, with the intention of adding spots of magenta to it. But looking at the image afresh, which I often do by flipping the canvas horizontally, the overall feel is a bit too green for my taste. So I change the hue more towards red instead. This is easy to do when you keep these elements on a separate layer. It also helps with being able to put some fog in between the buildings so they have a clearer outline.

13 **Extending the ruins:** The middle-ground ruin still looks to clean so I rough it up: I erase bits out of the edges and I add black ▶



12

10 **Paint buildings in the middle-ground using a mid-tone green for shadow and a blue-green color for lighter areas**

11 **A leafier, Canopy brush with more transparent areas is needed for middle-ground plants**

12 **The middle-ground canopy is colored with dark green first, and then a red hue**

13 **Work on the middle-ground with the Mixer brush, adding black spots and holes**



13



spots and holes to it. That second tower to the left could be more prominent too so I extend the top of it. I do this by using a Mixer brush to build up the height of the tower. It's a fast way to create detailed looking patterns with color information already in it. I also use this tool to add more buildings in the far distance on a separate layer.

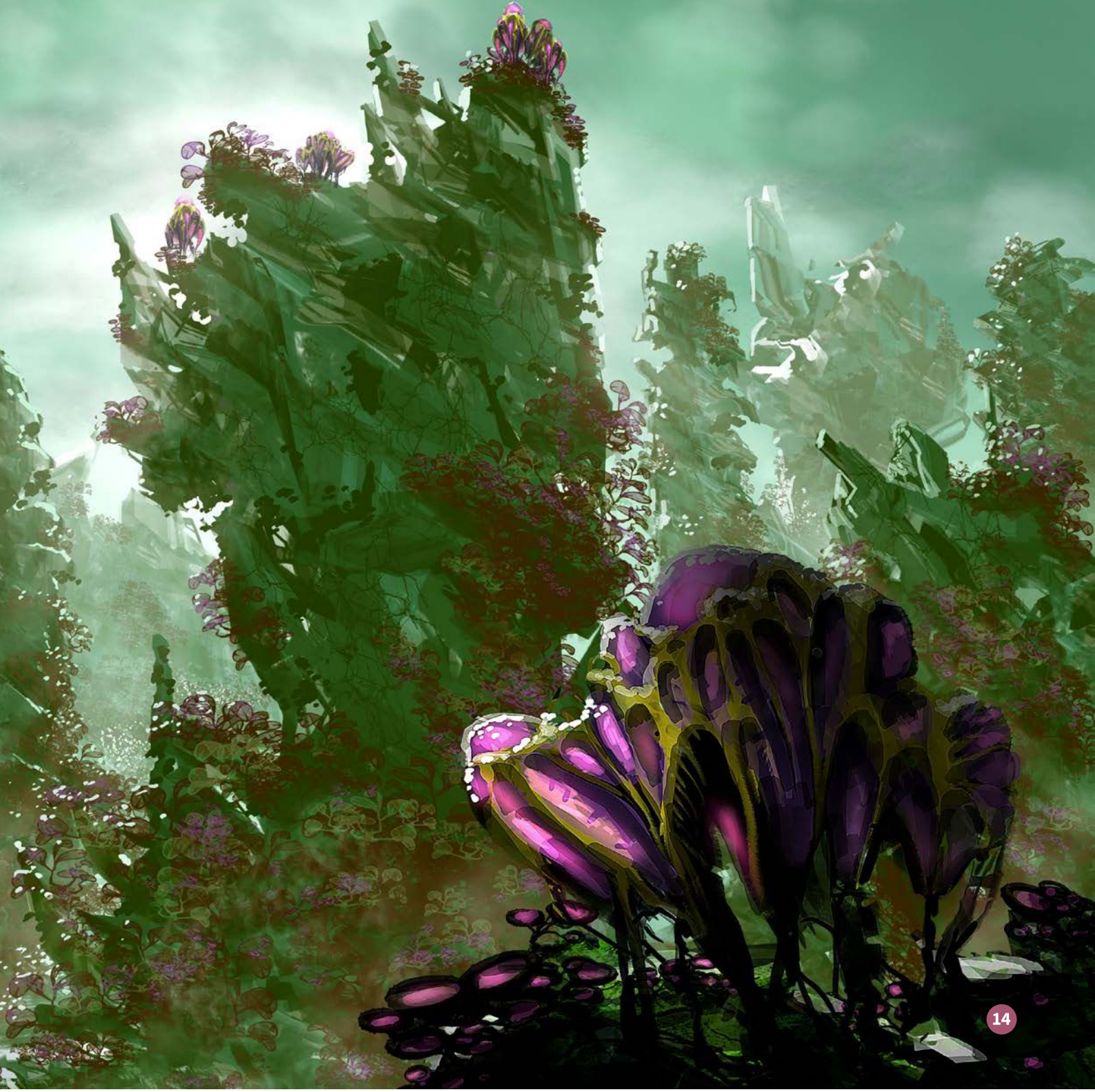
14 **Nearing completion:** After adding more buildings in the far distance, all with their own layers of growth upon them, I realize that the lighting is not to my satisfaction. I correct that by adding a layer on top of the foreground buildings and using the Rectangular brush again to add more black (at 40% Opacity) to the shadows and more white (also 40% Opacity) to the edges of that tower.

The flowers on the right foreground get more shadow on that same layer with the Soft Round brush at 30% Opacity. This gives a more natural feel to the lighting and brings the focus more to the center. I keep from painting over the edges of that flower by pressing Control and clicking on the image icon of the flower layer, thus selecting the flower's pixels.

By pressing Ctrl+H you get rid of that annoying pixel-train, but don't forget to de-select it at the end (Ctrl+D). Also, by adding waves with the Waves brush (included in the downloadable resources) the river actually starts looking more like a river.

15 **Completion:** My thirteen year old daughter passed by and added her usual pearl of observational wisdom: "that building looks more like a rock, daddy." And she was right, so by using that Mixer brush again I put some constructional pattern on that tower by the river, making it look a bit more like a ruined building.

By zooming very far out I use the Cloudcover brush to add some sunrays without the strokes going all bendy, which would easily happen with



the image covering my entire Cintiq. The clouds still look too out of focus so by using another cloud brush to paint white at 50% Opacity, and using that same brush shape to erase bits out, a more natural cloud cover appears.

An image is never finished but I feel this is the time to walk away from it. I hope you enjoyed the process and have fun with experimenting with the tips you've read here and the brushes I have enclosed for your use. ●

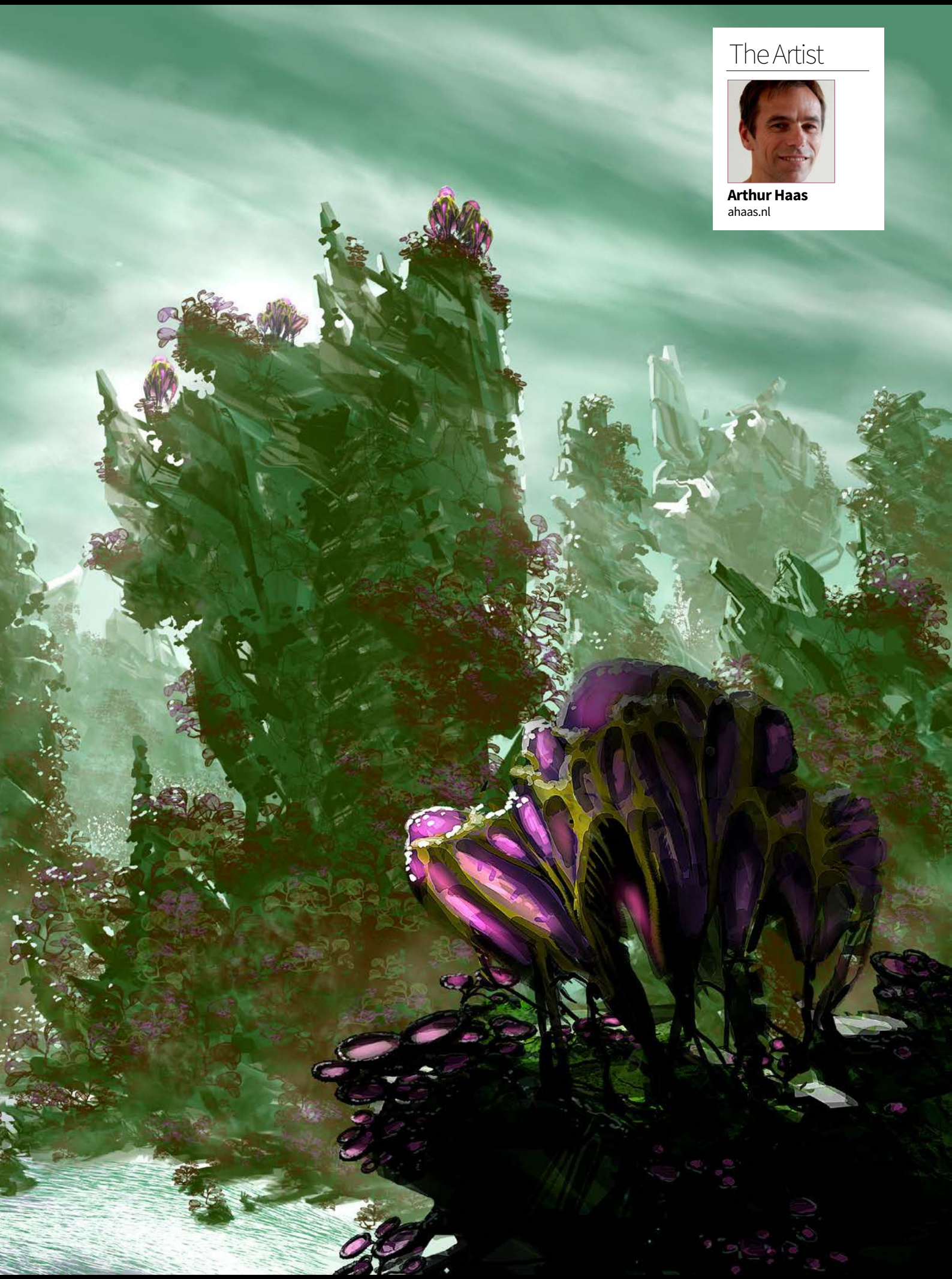
14 **The Waves brush gives the river detail and corrections are made to the lighting with new layers and the Rectangular brush**

PRO TIP

Paint pallet

Once I have my basic foreground colors the way I like them, I make a paint pallet of colors somewhere on a convenient spot and layer so I can easily pick those colors when I need them. This works better for me than to constantly pick those colors out of the image where they might not be the right tone anymore. This helps to keep the colors consistent throughout the image.





The Artist

Arthur Haas
ahaas.nl


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Develop an atmospheric cityscape

Discover how freelance concept artist David Tilton created his luminous cityscape *Abandoned* using 3D bases and Photoshop painting techniques



The Artist

David Tilton
artstation.com/artist/tiltond

Software Used:
Photoshop

David Tilton, based in Boston, Massachusetts, is a concept artist for the game and film industry. He specializes in world design and illustration and has recently been working on projects for StudioCanal.

All images © David Tilton

Get tips for incorporating 3D into your workflow...

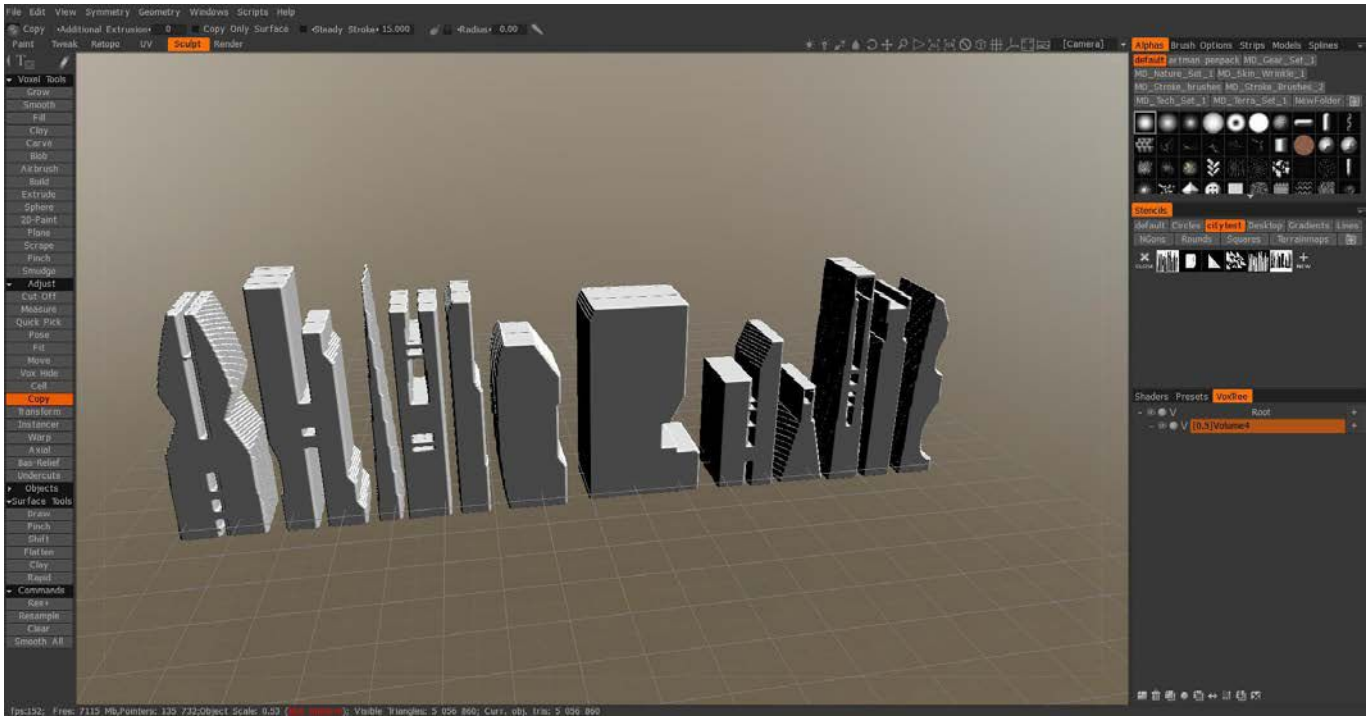
When creating an image it can be quite frustrating, especially in this day in age, when there are so many tools, and so many new things to try. It is important to lock down a workflow that fits your work style. In this breakdown I will be showing you my workflow on how to create a sci-fi city using both 2D and 3D techniques.

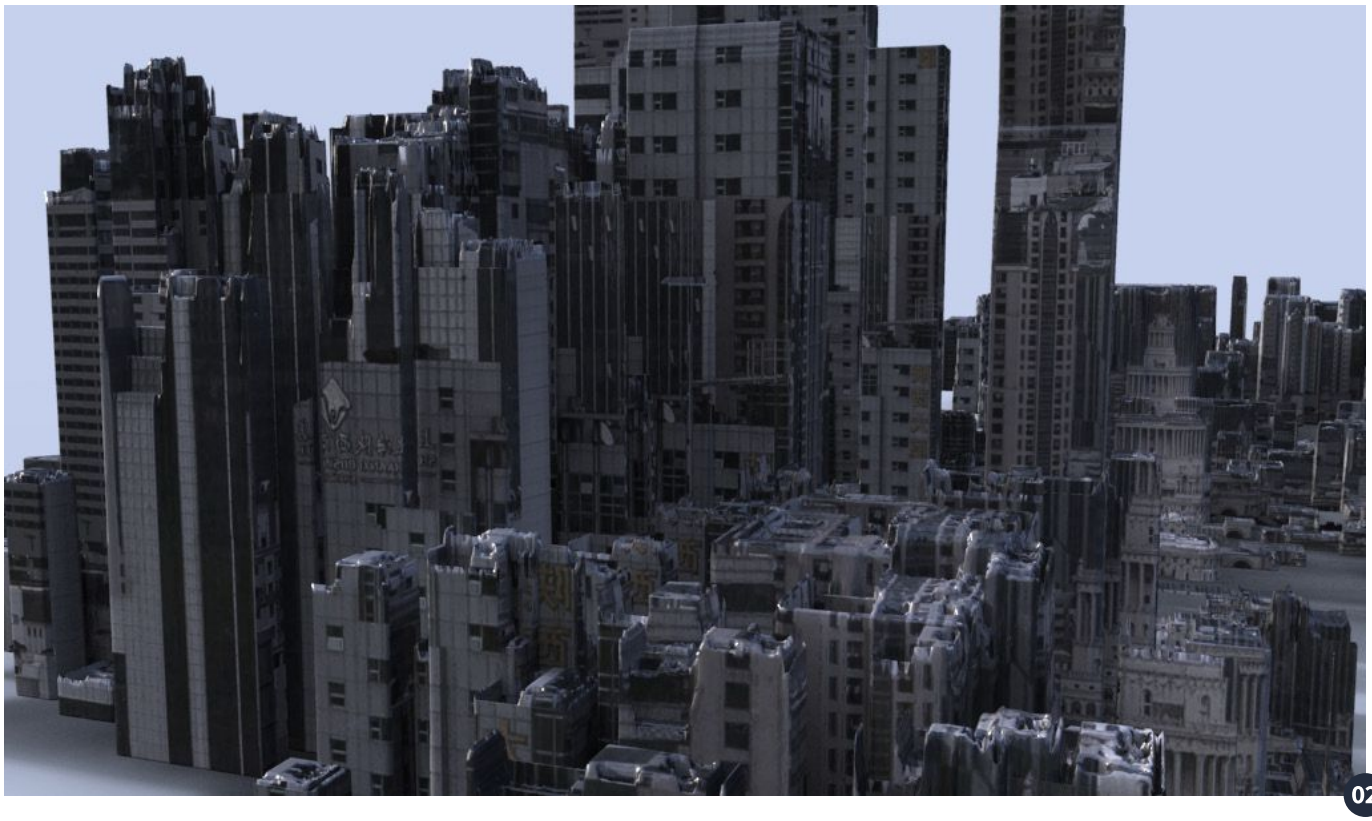
A lot of the techniques in this breakdown I have learned from Jama Jurabaev, who has been helping me out for a while now, and I can't thank him enough. Anyway, I hope you learn something from this breakdown! So let's begin now!

01 **Start modeling!** For this first step, I started by constructing my buildings for the cityscape. I used stencils in 3D-Coat to create a couple of buildings that I could play around with. 3D-Coat is a great tool and allows for speed and flexibility in modeling – it feels like painting in 3D.

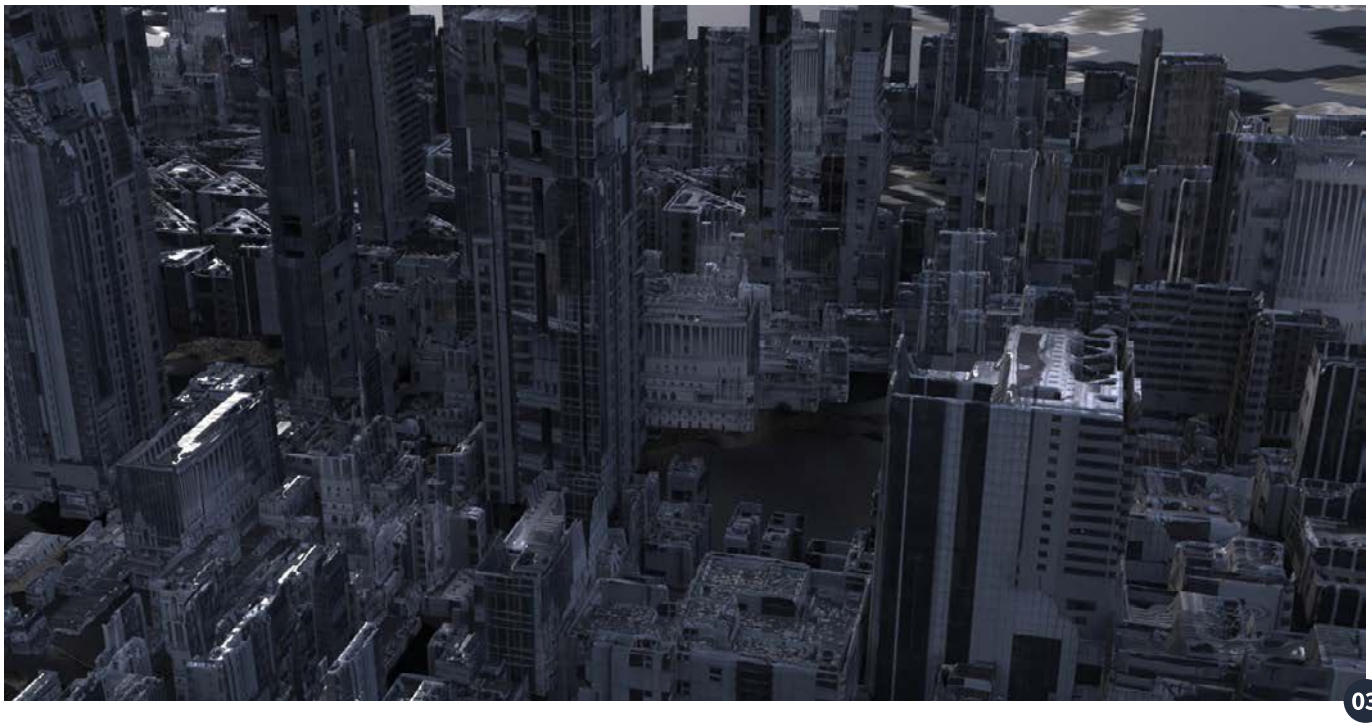
For an image like this it's important to have both low-lying buildings and tall skyscrapers. This allows for contrast in size and I believe that contrast is what pushes an image the most.

02 **Setting up the scene:** With the models I had created in 3D-Coat, I began to





02



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arrange them into a scene in KeyShot using the Array function. This provides for a sense of randomness in the final image, which is really good in a cityscape allowing it to have a sense of flow. It gives me a result that would have been too meticulous to create by myself.

03 **Rearranging the scene:** Once I established a decent base in 3D, I went back and corrected it where I thought it was needed. In this case, I went back and added some more buildings. I also filled in some of the blank space that would've drawn the eye if they stayed in the final image. It's important to address problems early on so they don't arise later on in the final piece, at which point they would be a lot harder to fix.

This was also a good time to think about the camera angle of the image. Placing the camera in an interesting location can give the scene a more dynamic feeling.

04 **Values, values, values!** Once I finished lighting and rendering my scene in KeyShot, I brought it into Photoshop and started painting. I started by painting a quick value study on top of the render to try and realize the lighting that I would want in the final image. That meant that there would be less guess work when ▶

01 **David created a variety of buildings using stencils in 3D-Coat**

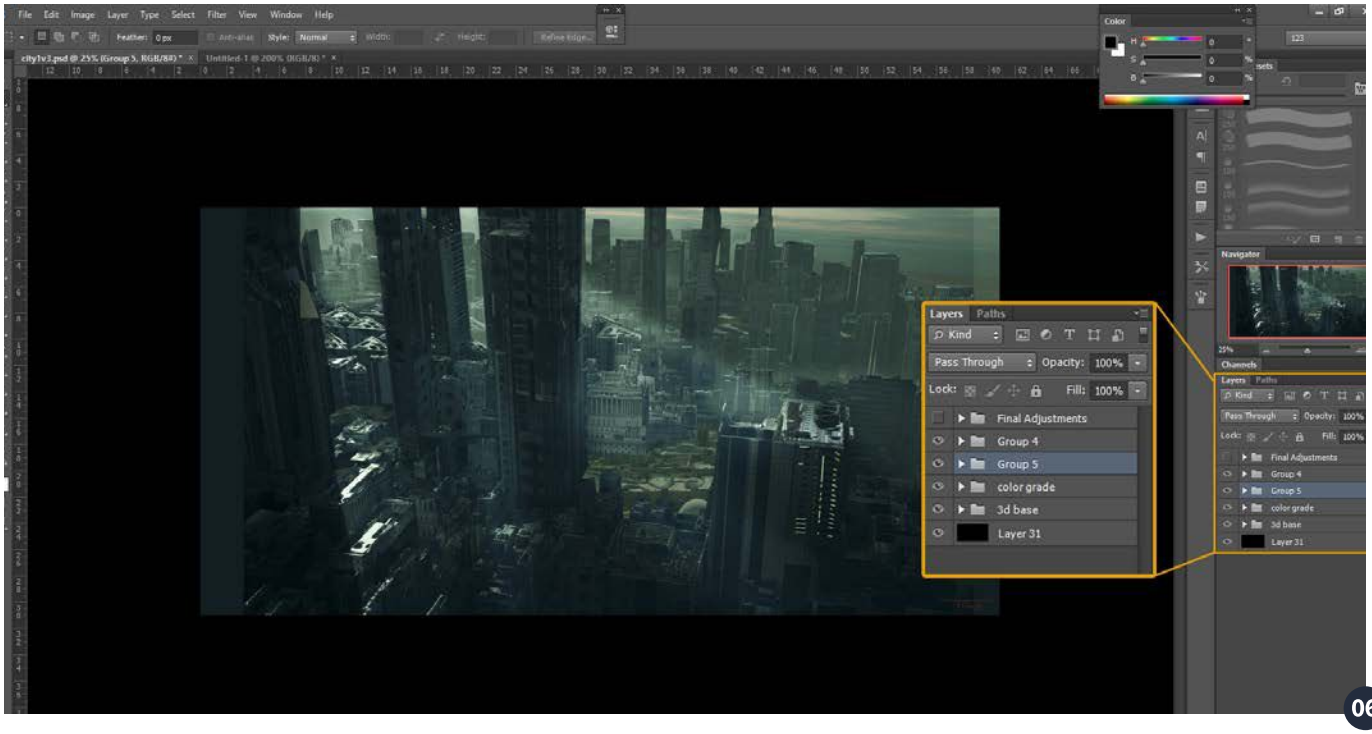
02 **The Array function in KeyShot provided a sense of randomness to the arrangement of the buildings**

03 **Blank spaces are filled and different camera angles are explored**

04 **This would become the base for the lighting in the final image**



05



06

creating the final color image, and would save a lot of time later on. Being efficient is a good habit to have. I believe that having a good value structure helps make a successful image.

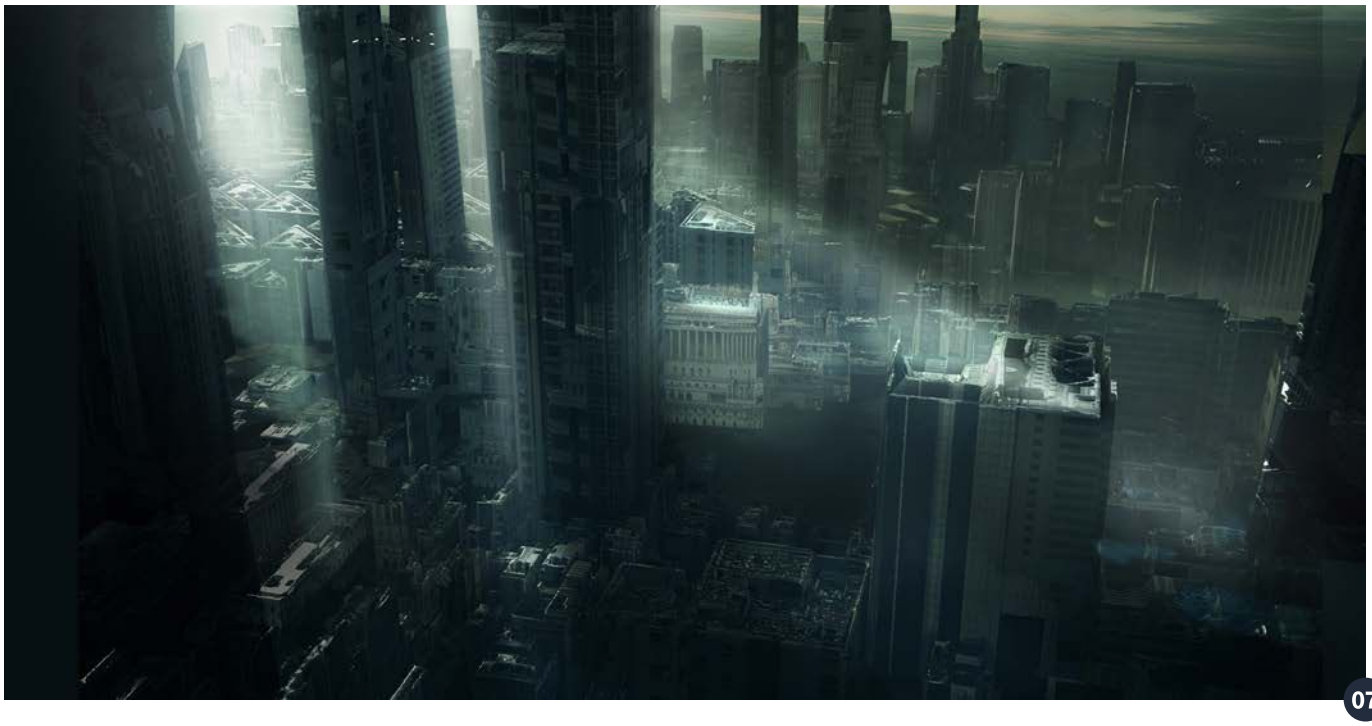
05 **Color grade:** Once I established the scene and the lighting I wanted, I began color grading the 3D. This established the mood that I wanted for the image. It helped to remove a lot of the guesswork about which colors I would need to apply to certain parts of the canvas, and it also helped to create a good base to enhance the lighting further.

06 **Keep organized:** I think it's important to keep your layers as organized as possible, as doing this allows you to quickly make adjustments to certain areas of the image. Organizing your layers also helps a ton as you continue to render the whole image.

In my case, I kept all the adjustment and FX layers on top, the 3D layers on the very bottom, and any paint-over at the very top of the layer groups. This allowed me to preserve almost anything in the image in case I wanted or needed to go back and change something.

07 **Paint-over:** Once the color grading was done, I began to paint-over the image, trying to achieve the lighting that I had made in the value composition. Paint is a good way to simplify complex 3D work and also gives it a more personal feeling. Don't be afraid to paint over your 3D.

I used to get caught up in spending ages working on the models and never wanted to cover up the work that I had done on them. However, knowing where and when to simplify an image is something that pushes the final image.



07



08

08 **Effects:** Once I had simplified the image where I needed to and had something close to what I wanted for the final image, I began overlaying photos on top to add some lights into the scene. I experimented with blending modes to see what looked best as I did this.

Once I had added the lights to the scene I realized the image was pretty static as a whole. I asked a few peers and they agreed; one suggested that I add some smoke or a spaceship to the scene. I opted for some smoke and made it red, the complementary color to green, to help that area pop as a focal point.

I also tried to mess with the exposure of the image a little, but in the end choose to go with what I had before. We're almost done at this point.

09 **Final touches:** At this point the image was pretty much complete. What was needed was just to add some final details. I feel that these small details help push an image that much more, and spending the extra time on them makes all the difference.

I added some fog to help push back the background buildings a bit more and push the contrast of the foreground buildings. Along with painting some radio towers and antenna to help with scale, finally I added some vignetting and a bit of grain to help unify everything and get a bit of that cinematic look.

Thanks for reading and if you'd like to know more about 3D-Coat techniques, I highly recommend Jama Jurabaev's "Intro to 3D Concept Design" course. I hope you've enjoyed this quick breakdown. Keep experimenting! ●

05 **Color grading the 3D elements took the guesswork out of adding color to the image**

06 **David tried to group as many layers as possible to reduce the clutter**

07 **Painting over 3D work can simplify an image and make it more personal**

08 **David added red smoke to complement the green light and reduce the static look of the image**





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Le Retour

by Gilles Beloeil

Discover how senior concept artist at Ubisoft Montréal created his ambient illustration *Le Retour*

All images © Gilles Beloeil



The Artist

Gilles Beloeil
gillesbeloeil.com

Software Used:
Photoshop

Gilles Beloeil is a senior concept artist at Ubisoft Montréal, Canada. He has worked on multiple projects for the *Assassin's Creed* universe and also creates concept art for print publication.

I am from Brittany, France. During my last trip there, I was very much inspired by the beautiful coastal scenery and by all the amazing places I visited, such as the Mont Saint-Michel. Back home in Montréal, Canada, I decided to paint the best image I could to transpose the magic I felt during my trip. I imagined a scene with medieval or fantasy elements. The image is about a King returning to his castle after a long period of absence.

I wanted to express the feeling of a very important moment, the one when the first of his people see him arriving back home, maybe from a battle. Being happy with the end result, I thought it was a good idea to propose it for *Digital Art Masters: Volume 9*. I was thrilled the image was chosen! I'll try to explain in more depth the making of process from beginning to end. It was painted exclusively in Photoshop.

The beginning

I first started with a drawing. At this point, my focus was mainly on composition, perspective and how to organize everything in order to achieve a good painting that was readable and interesting to look at. The strong triangular shape of the King combined with the strong diagonal in the background helped to focus our attention there. Also, the main character and his horse were the only characters we see entirely in the picture. The zigzag of the path also leads to his head, as well as the horizon line. Using the lines of the drawing as a reference, I then began a block in. This was the time to decide which values and which colors to use.

> **"I asked myself a question you should always ask yourself when doing something artistic: 'What if?'"**

It was experimental and a very important part of the process – no one should rush this step. I painted quickly and constantly changed my decision to see what looked better. I picked colors here or there on different references, photos and paintings; I changed the values, the hue, the saturation and so on.

Refining before decision making

It was time to refine everything, and to make choices before entering the more time-consuming stage – the detailing. So I did every shape more precisely until the layout was done and I knew where I was going. I was satisfied by what I had at this point, but I was not that excited.

The mood was very joyful and full of hope, but it differed a bit from what was happening in the scene. Nobody looked very happy. So I asked myself a question you should always ask yourself when doing something artistic: "What if?" The more you ask yourself this question, the more you explore, the more you'll find interesting stuff. So, the question was, "What if it was a darker mood?"

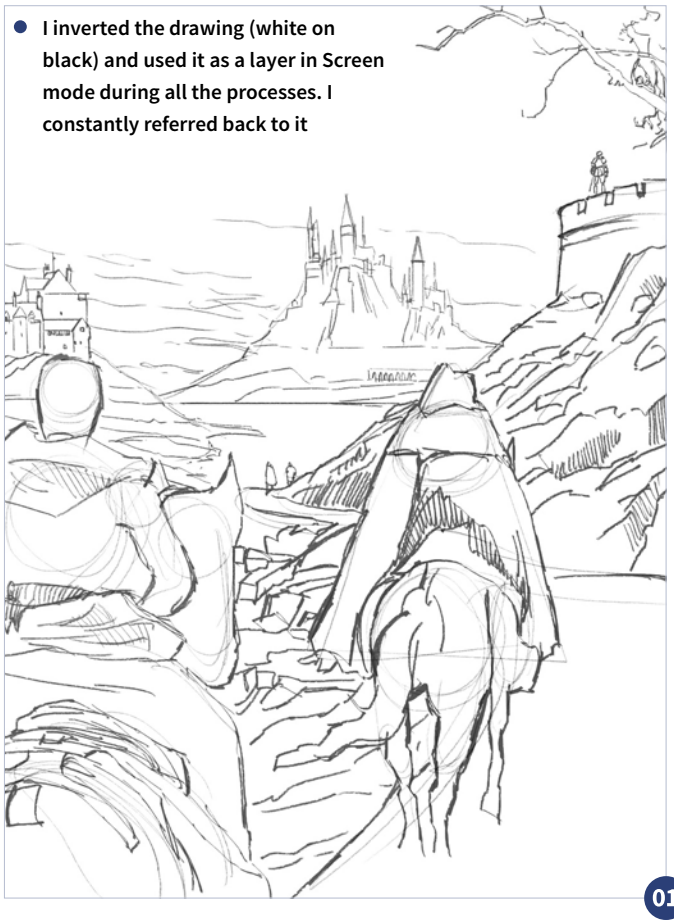
I changed the entire value relationship of my painting. Most of the values were now dark; very close in hue to each other, except the sky and the path that were brighter. I simply pasted one of my photographs for the sky. I wanted a dramatic sky and it was not dramatic enough for the moment but it was a good start.

The background and foreground character

Next, I wanted to focus on the background. The sky now looked more dramatic, with a big mass of clouds on the left, which echoed the mass at the right of the picture (in the middle ground). The movement of the clouds also helped to guide the viewer's eye to the main character.

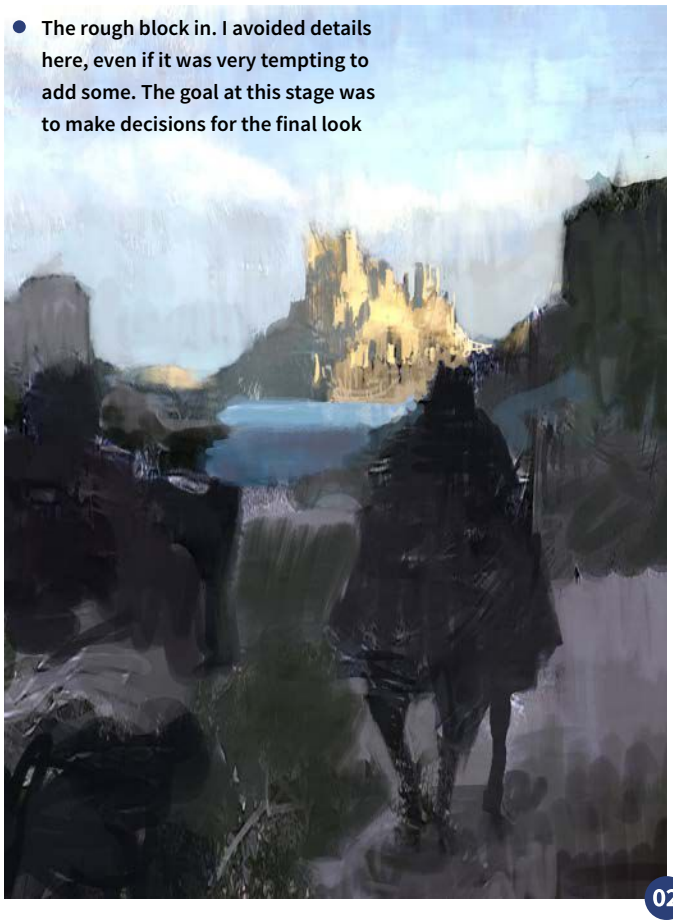
Pay attention to the major lines in the picture at this point. The eyes follow the path from the King's head to the castle, then to the clouds, to the tree, the tower, back to the King's head again and then you go to the foreground character before you are back to the road or back up in the clouds. Your eyes are now trapped!

The lines avoid sending you to a corner or to non-interesting parts of the painting. Lines are



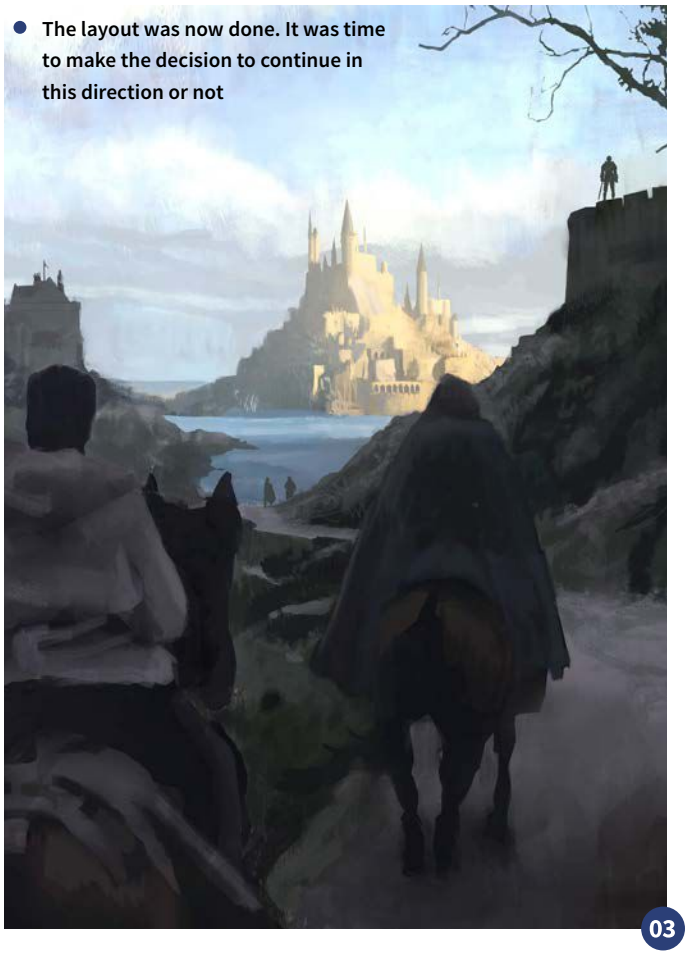
I inverted the drawing (white on black) and used it as a layer in Screen mode during all the processes. I constantly referred back to it

01



The rough block in. I avoided details here, even if it was very tempting to add some. The goal at this stage was to make decisions for the final look

02



The layout was now done. It was time to make the decision to continue in this direction or not

03



After the fixing, it was now a low-key value approach; much better for the feeling I wanted the viewers to have

04

very important for the readability; it is what makes a good composition. I reworked the silhouette of the background elements, playing with the amount of fog here and there. The castle was now more exciting to look at, it had more character. The fog mass at the bottom of it helped a lot for that, and also gave an opportunity to detach the King's head from the background.

Speaking of the King, I wanted to add some color, a bright red that contrasted with the monochromatic feeling of the scene. I also detached its entire silhouette a bit more from the background, to make it clearer and more readable.

Then I realized that the foreground character was not interesting enough and decided to change him. A soldier would be more convincing and give more insight about the era. It made sense too that a King would be escorted by his army. I changed the silhouette of the castle too, trying to represent a good variety of shapes.

Adjustments and final touches

At this point I found the color palette too cool, so I used a Curves adjustment layer and also added more yellows and reds overall. When I want to change color temperatures like this, I also use the Photo Filter adjustment layer and paint on the mask to reveal parts of the painting I want to correct. When it was done, I re-adjusted things like the curve of the top of the tower on the right, because I felt it was not right. I curved it a little bit more.

I also changed the value of the sea. It was now brighter and the castle darker. I felt it read better. I also added a highlighted part on the sea behind the castle, so it added more depth and also helped define the overall castle shape. I then added more fog at the bottom of the castle and changed the shape of it to add more variety. ▶



I mostly worked on the background at this stage, giving the King brighter colors

05

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06



07

I painted textures on the rocks at the right, and I made sure that the scale of all the rocks were digressing with distance. I added the character on the top right and some birds. The final touch overall was the fact that I chose to Motion Blur the foreground character, so he is not competing with the main one. It also makes sense because he is moving.

Take your time

Usually, when I do illustration for myself, I do not render a lot of details. I do sketches, try new stuff, experiment, study, and never show them to the community; because the result is usually not that interesting (it is the learning I get from those illustrations that interests me). For this one, the goal was to make the best image I could, without experimenting, with a very traditional way of working (detailed drawing, big shapes of values, rendering), and taking all the time I needed to do so, no matter how long it would take.

It took me about thirty hours to finish it and I think the result is rather interesting. I like that the composition looks a bit different from the paintings I normally do. The one thing I learned from this painting is that using close, dark values for most of your painting, and punching that with one or two bright values, usually gives an interesting result. ●



08

06 **Now the foreground character was clearly a soldier, the shape of the castle and the tree were also now more interesting to look at**

07 **I warmed up the color temperature of the overall image**

08 **Final touches and corrections, adding texture and details**





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